

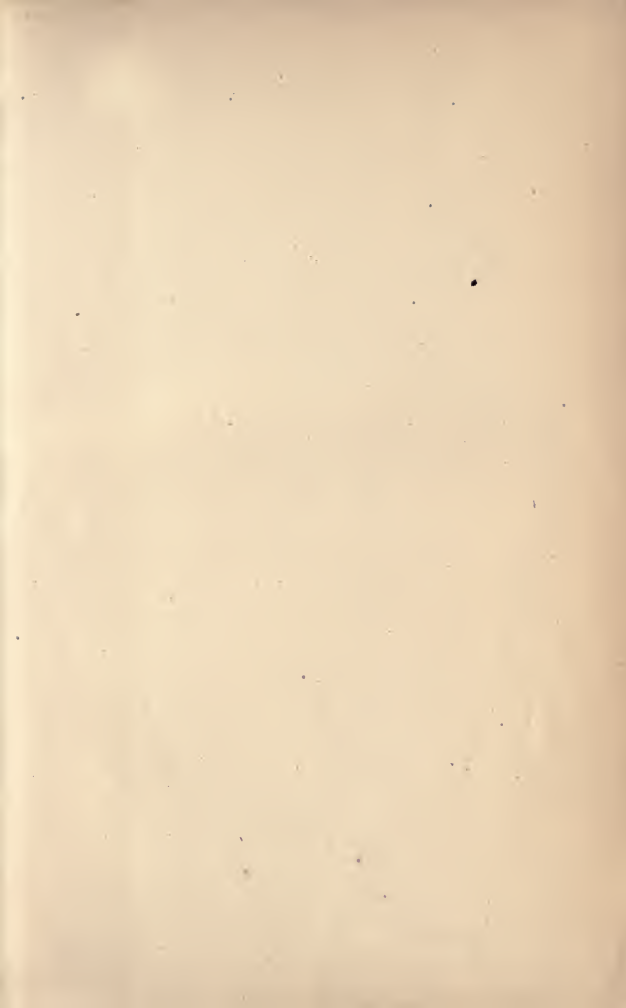


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The Willoughby Boys.—Frontispiece.



“How d’ye do, Blanche? So you’re here yet?”

ODD MOMENTS

OF THE

WILLOUGHBY BOYS.

BY

MRS. EMILY HARTLEY,

AUTHOR OF

"BARLEY LOAVES," "PHIL DERRY," "RUTH ALLERTON,"
"CHRISTMAS WITH THE GIRLS," "CHRISTMAS WITH
THE BOYS," "HALF A DOZEN GIRLS," "HALF
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ODD MOMENTS

OF THE

WILLOUGHBY BOYS.

CHAPTER I.

AN EVENING AT PANTOPS.

ONE morning the children of Questiford Village were surprised on their way to school by the sight of large posters adorning fences, trees, and stone-walls in all directions; one occupied a place in the window of Miss Trimble's "toy and fancy goods emporium," as its owner proudly named her tiny store; another was daringly pasted on the door of the school-house. These posters were evidently of home manufacture, for instead of being printed they were neatly stencilled; also certain ornamental flourishes were skilfully executed in crayon. The grown people passing along the streets gave a glance and

smile at these strange adornments of the usually unmeaning blankness of wall and fence. The children gathered in groups before the various red and yellow papers, and there was much laughing and whistling, together with occasional emphatic exclamations of approval found only in the vocabulary of school-boys. The announcement was made on this wise:

“ATTENTION, ALL!”

“An entertainment will be given this (Tuesday) evening in the Pantops dining-room.

“The programme will comprise a number of astounding feats of PRESTIDIGITATION by the Prince of Conjurers, Pierrotto Willinotto.

“A Panorama of Palestine, by a distinguished American artist, will be displayed.

“A remarkable and extensive exhibition of stuffed birds and animals, by an experienced Taxidermist, will close the evening’s programme.

“The performance will begin precisely at seven o’clock.

“Admission, five cents. No half-price tickets. Children are requested to bring their parents.”

A feeling of respect succeeded the first im-

pulse to ridicule in the minds of the boys and girls of Questiford as soon as they came to the word, all in capitals, "Prestidigitation." Nobody had the least idea of what it meant, and the explanation was but vaguely hinted at by the word "Conjurers" that followed. "Pierrotto Willinotto" was but a thin disguise for the familiar name Pierre Willoughby, but that gave them no help to the understanding of the proposed feats. Very few among the children had ever seen a panorama, but they had come across that word in their spelling-books and knew that it stood for a picture of some sort. As to the stuffed birds and animals, that was plainly enough Rex's part in the performance; therefore "Taxidermist" must mean a fellow who spent his time in setting traps for birds, catching bugs, hunting for squirrels, and the like.

"Let's go!" said the children to one another; and as they turned away from the attractive posters with hasty skips and runs, lest they should not be in season to answer the roll-call, many a whispered consultation took place as to ways and means of procuring the five cents demanded for admission.

That afternoon eager pairs of eyes that ought

not to have wandered above slate-rims and atlases, glanced frequently up to the school-room windows to discover whether certain ominous clouds were likely to spoil the anticipated fun. These proved very kind, after all, and took themselves quite out of sight by the time school was dismissed. The beautiful harvest moon was at its full, and lighted group after group of youngsters on their way that evening up the hill and along the shady quiet street which terminated in Pantops, the comfortable old-fashioned mansion in which already three generations of Willoughbys had spent their lives.

There was a door leading from the garden directly into the dining-room; this stood hospitably open on the present occasion, and the lights within gave friendly greeting to all who approached. It was well they did so, for many of the young people—and the parents too, whom, according to the suggestion, these sons and daughters had brought along—had never been inside the walls of old Pantops.

A mysterious curtain concealed the farther end of the long room, and rows of chairs filled the remainder. The audience gathered slowly. Now and then the tip of a nose was seen pro-

truding from the other side of the curtain as one of the performers gave an anxious glance at the rows of chairs. Before the tall clock in the corner had given forth its seven strokes every seat was occupied and every eye attentively fixed on the closed curtains. Soft music was heard in an adjoining room, growing gradually louder and then subsiding. As it died away like a flute in the distance the impression of awe was disturbed by a familiar voice shouting, "Turn down the light, somebody there!" This order was immediately obeyed by one of the fathers present. The curtain rose, revealing "the Prince of Conjurers" standing beside a small table. Nobody recognized the magician. He was a person of medium height with black moustache and a heavy beard; he wore an immense white turban and a long robe of gorgeous colors. He glanced around the room, but spoke not a word. So busy were the majority of the audience in examining the dress and features of the wizard that the quick movements of his hands on the table were unobserved. Instantly a bright flash of lightning darted across the room. Some of the children screamed with terror and not a few of the older people moved nervously in their seats. A sec-

ond brilliant line of light, another, and another in rapid succession, moved across the darkened space between the conjurer and the excited beholders, and then the curtain fell.

"It's one of the works of the devil, and I'm goin' home."

This announcement was delivered in a rough, ill-natured tone by somebody in the back row of seats, and those who turned to discover who the speaker might be whispered to one another, "It's only Hiram Boggs," and forgot their fright in amusement.

"Come, Nance! come, Sam!" said Hiram to his children in a loud tone; "on with your mittens, and let's be off! Them as likes to be mixed up with such wickedness, let 'em stay."

It appeared that Nance and Sam did not agree with their father's views, for they held back and whispered words of discontent and resistance; but the ignorant and bigoted old cobbler would not yield, but marched his son and daughter out of the door in haste, lest the curtain should rise again and reveal some other device of the evil one.

The general stir and amusement caused by the exit of the Boggs family did much to restore a feeling of comfort, and when the cur-

tain was again lifted the first shock of terror had almost passed away. All eyes were at once directed to the dignified figure of the prestidigitator, who stood calmly behind his little table. In one hand he held an innocent-looking glass rod, and in the other a tea-cup. He coughed two or three times, as if suffering from a "frog in the throat," and then, in a fine, squeaky voice, addressed the company.

"My friends," said he, "I notice that considerable alarm was felt at the lightning-flashes which I caused by the secrets of my art to pass across the room. I must assure you that, however wonderful these feats of prestidigitation may appear, there is no danger to be feared from them—not the least. Also," and there was a twinkle in the speaker's eyes, "I hope you will believe that I am not in partnership with the devil, as one of the audience gave me credit for."

A general laughing and stamping of feet interrupted the speaker. The joke was completely turned on old Hiram Boggs, each one forgetting his own share in the fright. Then a big boy, who thought the applause had lasted long enough and was impatient for the entertainment to proceed, called out,

"We'll trust you, Pierrotto Whatever-your-name-is; so go ahead."

Before the last word was uttered the magician caught up a stick which had lain unobserved on the floor beside him and waved it violently. This caused a sudden hush, and with a loud voice, in which the assumed squeakiness was quite forgotten, the wizard pronounced the strange incantation, "Cassafelto, presto, aldiborontiphoskiphorniosticos!" and instantly the whole room was filled with such a brilliant illumination that many of the girls hid their eyes behind their handkerchiefs. Nobody seemed to be watching the performance very closely to discover how the startling effect was produced—nobody, that is, but one long-limbed boy in the front row of seats, who leaned forward and gazed eagerly at every motion of the turbaned magician. He noticed that the glass rod was placed in the tea-cup for an instant—that was all; but how could so simple an act produce so remarkable an effect?

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," proceeded the wizard, "we will try an experiment in coloring. I have here, as you see, some liquid of a bright blue; certain articles dipped in this will be changed to bright red."

He held up a tube as he spoke, which, as all could see, contained something blue.

“Will some one lend me a knife?”

A dozen knives, of as many sorts and sizes, were immediately held up. The long-limbed boy in the front seat collected them and laid them on the table beside the conjurer.

“One will do,” said the professor of magic; and selecting one with a long thin blade he plunged it into the blue water, as it seemed to be, waited a few moments, and then held it up before the expectant eyes of the crowd, a bright red.

“Young man, will that ’ere paint come off?” called out the owner of the knife anxiously.

By way of answer the magician took a piece of paper from his pocket, wiped the blade and rubbed it, then handed it back as bright as before.

“Well, I never! that does beat all!” remarked the man, greatly relieved in mind.

After this a box was passed around for examination, and after being thoroughly looked at, felt of, turned upside down, and knocked to discover any secret spring, was returned to its owner with the verdict that it was an empty box and nothing more.

"Nevertheless, I shall proceed to take from it a few articles to show you," said the professor of mystery.

A shout of applause rang through the apartment when with thumb and forefinger the prestidigitator drew from the empty box several roses, some pictures, a handful of pop-corn, and a silk handkerchief. The long-legged boy nearly lost his balance as he leaned forward, eagerly enjoying the mystery. When the noise had subsided, Pierrotto Willinotto gracefully bowed his turbaned head to the audience, thanked them for their kind appreciation of his humble efforts, and said that he would now give place to the artist whose panorama had been announced. The curtain dropped, but the cheers went on, the walls of old Pantops fairly shaking with the unwonted sounds of shuffling, stamping, clapping, and whistling. Certainly, the magician had reason to be satisfied with his reception by a Questiford audience.

When the curtain rose again the small table had disappeared, and in place of the gorgeously-robed prestidigitator stood a slender boy of thirteen in his every-day suit of corduroys; his big brown eyes took a timid survey of the

audience, and the nervous tremble in the fingers with which he tossed back the obstinate lock from his forehead which teasing girls called his "bang," showed that the "distinguished American artist" was not accustomed to appearing in public. While Laurence Willoughby stood trying to control his bang and to clear his throat ready for speaking, the interested spectators had full opportunity for examining the new arrangements for their entertainment. The room being now quite dark, the little platform shone brilliantly. There was a neatly-covered stand that was not intended to betray itself as a common packing-box, and did not to the uncritical eyes of the youngsters in front. These simple Questiford boys and girls, like all unspoiled, natural children, had imaginations that overlooked the prosy realities around them, and believed that when a few bits of broken crockery were set up for a china tea-set, they were a china tea-set, and nothing short of it; when a fragment of tin, picked up from the refuse heap behind the tin-shop was decided to be a silver knife, a silver knife it certainly was, and woe to the rude scoffer who should dare to say that it was only a strip of tin! To the eyes of this assem-

bly, therefore, the dry-goods box, festooned about with Edna Willoughby's cast-off wrapper, was an elegant and appropriate piece of furniture.

Upon this stand rested a pretty construction of pasteboard and paint, a tiny proscenium with curtain and footlights, and through this, as in the distance, appeared a picture. Laurence had now found his voice; with his beloved panorama before him, over whose construction he had spent every leisure hour for weeks past, he became unconscious of the presence of others except as a set of eyes to enjoy with him the wonders of his ingenious toy.

"The view before us," began the young artist, "is one we all know, or ought to; it isn't long since we had it in our Sunday-school lessons—not the picture, but about the things that happened near this very spot. That's the Red Sea, ladies and gentlemen."

Laurence drew himself up and turned toward the spectators, waving the pointer he held with a gesture of delight.

"This is the point," he continued, "where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on their way toward the Promised Land. As the panorama moves along you will see next

Mount Serbal, where it is supposed that Moses struck the rock when God had only told him to speak to it."

While Laurence proceeded thus to name and explain the scenes presented the pictures slowly moved on, each giving place to another in a way very surprising to the children and some of the parents present. Meanwhile, the music, which had added to the attractiveness of the first part of the entertainment, now enhanced the charm of the panoramic display. No one could guess whence or how the sweet harmony was produced, for the Willoughbys had admitted no one into the secret of their arrangements, but a glance into the little apartment behind the dining-room would have revealed Edna seated at her cabinet-organ, where she could distinctly hear Laurence's voice and know when to play and when to keep silence.

As the pretty pictures succeeded one another there was a noiseless attention; and that instruction was given by the ingenious little panorama was testified by the allusions made in Questiford Sunday-school from time to time afterward to Laurence Willoughby's picture of this or that Bible locality.

All this had occupied considerable time. The fathers were beginning to draw out big silver watches, and the younger children to yawn and lean against convenient shoulders, for in that old-fashioned, sedate village

“Early to bed and early to rise
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise”

was a motto (“proved” as Macaulay says—in effect—“by the enormous fortunes acquired by chimney-sweeps and chamber-maids”) faithfully observed. The drowsy ones lost several of the last views, to the annoyance of the young artist, who had bestowed especial care on his representations of Jerusalem and its vicinity, with which the display ended. There was a pretty thorough rousing up, however, when, after the pause of a few moments, the curtain rose for the last time and revealed a small domestic menagerie of stuffed creatures, wild and tame, in the midst of which shone like a full moon the merry round face of Rex Willoughby. A general clapping of hands greeted the favorite of Questiford school, in return for which Rex bowed to right and left, then taking a step backward gave a long low whistle. Instantly a large handsome

dog sprang forward, and at a signal from his master made a bow also to the audience. Every child present was acquainted with Rex Willoughby's Victor, for he frequently followed the boy to school, carrying his basket of luncheon, and not unfrequently came dashing in during recitations either with some article Rex had forgotten or a note from his sister. All admired the wise and affectionate creature.

On this occasion Victor surprised his friends by certain unexpected accomplishments. At the shot of a pop-gun he fell heavily on the floor, closed his eyes and "played dead," not moving a muscle even when Rex gave him a kick, but when bidden "Come to life, sir!" the stiff limbs relaxed and with one great shake Victor was himself again. Next Rex offered him a toy gun, put a soldier-cap on his head, and he went through a regular drill as well as any boy in the room could have done. The delight of the children was unbounded when, placing a row of alphabet-blocks before the sensible animal, Rex ordered him to spell "boy," "pig," and "gun," and Victor put his paw cautiously on the different letters. No one was near enough to be sure that the spelling

was correct, but who could doubt Rex's assertion that it was all right or insult Victor's dignity by supposing he had made a mistake?

The dog, having completed his share in the evening's entertainment, bounded into the midst of the audience and snuffed about in search of his special friends. Pats and compliments were given him in abundance, and when he finally rested on his haunches beside the long-legged boy in the front row of seats his dignified bearing showed that he, at least, considered Victor Willoughby the hero of the hour.

"Any of you fellows that would like to look at my stuffed animals—There! I meant to say ladies and gentlemen," blundered forth the showman in some confusion—"please come this way."

Glad of an opportunity for moving their restless limbs, the juvenile portion of the audience quickly left their seats and scrambled to the front. All restraint was now laid aside, and the children made numberless comments on the exhibition before them, Rex all the while marching proudly up and down, his hands in his pockets and an expression of

comfortable self-approval on his rosy face that matched well with Victor's self-satisfied appearance.

"Hands off, please, Susie!" called out Rex to a little girl who was examining with her fingers the manner in which a stuffed bird was attached to a branch. "That's a jay, one of the prettiest I ever saw, and I caught him right over here in Baker's Woods."

"That?" said he, turning sharply round to answer the question of a boy of his own size. "Oh that's the very squirrel, Bob, that got me into trouble last spring. Don't you remember the day I was late to school, and Miss Moore kept me in all recess and an hour after school? I had gone off without any breakfast, and had tired myself all out racing after that squirrel. I wouldn't give him up, he was such a beauty, but I didn't bargain to stand in the middle of the floor all day, lose my dinner, and get a bad mark too."

"Yes, his tail was hanging out of your pocket, and the girls said you had been stealing your sister's furs."

An owl, a guinea-pig, a hare were recognized as familiar objects by the children, and duly admired, while some specimens of the

taxidermist's art which had cost the young naturalist most trouble were passed over with indifference, and a case of butterflies, Rex's special pride and delight, was scarcely noticed at all.

There was no definite moment of closing the entertainment; all were at liberty to remain as long as they liked, examining Rex's ingenious work. Sleepiness had, however, taken the place of enthusiasm with most of the small folk, and in groups of twos and threes they left the room, satisfied that they had received a full equivalent for their entrance fee of five cents, and with increased wonder at, and admiration for, the smartness of the Willoughby boys.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOOK-OUT ROOM.

IN these days one great trouble with clothes and with houses, as well as with the people who wear the former and live in the latter, is, that they are all alike. Fashion decides the color and texture and shape of our garments, so that in a crowd it is sometimes difficult to tell one's sister from an utter stranger; fashion also models our dwellings, so that before entering a house we know beyond a doubt just where to put our hand on the knob of the parlor-door and the relative position of all the other rooms. Happily, it cannot be said as certainly that one knows beforehand what will be done and said by the people living in the house; but the assertion is often too nearly possible to be flattering to human nature, which holds individuality as one of its chief marks of superiority to the rest of creation.

Old Pantops was a marked exception to this humiliating rule of modern houses. The fine old oaks that guarded its entrance answered the purpose of a door-plate giving the family name, for the "Willoughby oaks" were known even beyond the limits of Questiford, and their gnarled branches were thought by certain imaginative young people to form the initials "R. W.," in honor, it may be presumed, of the first of the family who resided there—Reginald Willoughby, whose name the youngest member of the present generation of Willoughbys bore. The house itself could not have been the outgrowth of any definite plan in the builder's mind. The rooms stood side by side, or looked across at one another with friendly surprise at meeting, much like a very social gathering where one and another "drops in" without ceremony; and there were endless possibilities of getting lost among the twisted little passages from which doors opened upon unexpected closets and rooms. This feature of the Pantops homestead made it particularly charming to young visitors from the city, who now and then came for a summer frolic to its cool, shady retirement.

The young Willoughbys had grown up with

a love for every nook and corner of the house quite incomprehensible to those who pass their lives in rented dwellings and move every few years. The knots in the boards of the garret-floor had been named from their shapes by the children who had grown to be grandparents, and were known now as "the dipper," "the looking-glass," "the old woman with a night-cap," and so on. The play-room, now fallen into disuse because of the advancing years of its owners, still kept its familiar nomenclature. When Auntie Blanche, the dear old colored servant and friend, found her way to this cherished spot on her regular cleaning-days, she seldom failed to be warned not to disturb Rosabel's bedstead, not to let the dust settle on the grotto, not to meddle with Robinson Crusoe's island or the enchanted palace. Auntie Blanche always listened with serious attention and nodded her bright kerchiefed head, then hobbled off to her work. The respect which the old dolls and their belongings received at her hands would have been turned to ridicule by a younger housemaid who had not grown familiar with every article used by "dem blessed chil'en" since the first rattle and rag doll of their babyhood.

The bedrooms of this unfashionable house were not pretty according to our present idea of prettiness. In lieu of light and graceful articles that could easily be lifted about were bureaus, tables, wardrobes of quaintly-carved mahogany, whose great claw feet might have sunk into the floor with their firm grip, for all possibility there seemed of moving them. The chairs were stately things with straight backs, that told of days when children were not allowed to lounge at their ease and even aged ladies sat erect and without leaning back. The embroidered roses on some of these looked faded enough to make one wish they had a "time to fall" to pieces like real flowers, and sundry kittens and puppies reposing on cushions were now mere dingy blotches on the canvas. There was something pathetic about this Pantops embroidery worked by the patient fingers of great-aunts and grandmothers so long at rest. Brass knobs glittered in every direction, as brilliant now, through Auntie Blanche's faithful rubbing, as when they were new. Over the high mantels hung portraits of the very ladies who had embroidered the roses, kittens, and puppies, and of the gentlemen who perhaps read aloud or talked pleasant nonsense to them

while their fingers flew among the bright wools.

The parlor was the most modern room of the house. There Edna's piano had replaced her grandmother's harpsichord, and many fancies of present taste had brightened up the apartment. The great mirror had once reflected the picture of a tomb over which hung a weeping willow, and on either side of this sad ornament a massive silver candelabrum filled with tall wax candles of many colors. Now a popular engraving in bright new frame was repeated in the glass, and a pair of charming vases, brought from a New York store as lately as Edna's last birthday, held the places once sacred to the time-honored candelabra. There were many trifles scattered about, marking the room as the property of the present generation much more obviously than any change of furniture. The newest pattern of tidies covered the old chairs; new music lay on the piano; the latest novelty in mats stretched itself before the door. It was a pleasant place, this parlor, holding just such a combination of past and present as to brighten the one into living cheerfulness and to give a touch of sentiment to the other.

But it is high time for us to close the parlor-door, hasten up stairs, open a door to the left of the landing, step cautiously along the winding passage, ascend another stair, and lift the latch of the Look-out Room. It has taken a long while to get to the place indicated at the head of the chapter, for Pantops is not a house to be rushed through in disrespectful haste.

This is a large apartment, and it has need to be, for it is, for this generation of Willoughbys, the very heart of the house. It is a well-lighted room; and that also it has need to be, for here the three brothers and one sister work away at their special interests and undertakings, and each needs window-room of his and her very own. The carpet covering the wide floor is patched and faded in streaks, for it has done a deal of service in its day, and now, in its last estate, the best parts of the best breadths, that formerly were protected from light and wear by large pieces of furniture standing over them when they covered parlor and library floors, have come to receive the wear and tear and homely uses of the Look-out Room. The dormer-windows, staring like great eyes on each side of the sloping roof, kept watch like the

fabled giant Argus, over all that went on for a circuit of several miles. A storm might be on its way from whatever direction it would, its movements could not be hidden from watchers in the Look-out Room. The sowing and the reaping in many fields had been looked upon with interest through successive seasons by one generation of Willoughby children after another, and no coming guest could approach the house unannounced if one of the family happened to be in this room at the time.

It must not be supposed that our young people kept each his particular window for the sake of observing the occurrences of the world outside. They were far too busy for that, and in this very respect utterly unlike their ancestor, the former Reginald, an idle, dreamy man, who had planned this apartment for a sort of observatory, whence, lying at his ease on his sofa and smoking his favorite meerschaum, he could survey the field and woods on every side. Hence came the name bestowed on the place itself—"Pantops," *far-seeing*.

The west window commanded a view of the village. The hill upon whose summit stood the home of the Willoughbys sloped gradually down—so gradually that all Questiford

was built on an inclined plane. Its natural beauty was considerable, but most of the dwellings were poor and unattractive, and even those of the better sort had no greater merit than the white paint and green blinds which betokened gentility to the Questiford mind. At this west window stood a plain, substantial desk, such as had done service in many a school-room. This one, with its blots and scratches, looked as if it might have had years of hard usage in that very way. This was Edna's boudoir. Here she sat day after day, devoting her leisure hours to thinking out, and then rapidly writing, stories and poems for little children. It was her one ambition to reach the hearts of boys or girls by these written words. So shy she was, this grown woman of twenty years, that she would turn a corner of the street in her walks if she found herself on the point of meeting one of those very boys or girls whose pleasure she had in view when busy with her pen. No one outside the family circle knew that she aspired to be an authoress. It was fame enough for her when the boys would hurrah over the appearance of one of her stories or little poems in a child's paper, and Auntie Blanche's

old black face would shine with delight at the "wunnerful smart pieces" her "young missy" made up. At this time-worn desk Edna loved to sit when the glory of sunset fell upon the homely little houses and gave poetic significance to the common flower-gardens, the backyards with their clothes-lines and bleaching-grounds, the cows coming home to be milked, the children playing ball or tag, kite or marbles, as the season might dictate. From these prosaic scenes grew, budded, and flowered many pleasant fancies, which, when duly set forth upon the printed page, started kindly thoughts and noble aspirations in young minds hundreds of miles distant from the quiet dreamer in the Pantops Look-out.

Directly opposite Edna's desk, and blocking up the lower panes of the east window, stood a set of shelves that years ago had filled a recess in the library and been filled with valuable books. Now it held a curious collection of bottles, tea-cups discarded from household use, glasses and tubes and bits of rag; in fact, a perfect medley. Nobody was ever allowed to touch these shelves with even a finger, to say nothing of dust-cloth or scrubbing-brush. In vain did Auntie Blanche entreat and scold

by turns; "Marse Pierre" would have his side of the room left sacred to disorder and science.

The north window afforded a near view of a picturesque little stream spanned by a rustic bridge, the work of the Willoughby brothers in holiday hours. In the distance the stream lost its way in the woods, beyond which rose a succession of hills, not bold enough to make the landscape a striking one, but sufficiently high and irregular in outline to furnish many a study to the young artist whose nook this was. Here stood the table, with its color-box and case of pencils, at which Laurence spent his odd moments. The one deep drawer of the table held many sketches, most of them in pencil, but a few careful studies in water-color. In striking contrast to Pierre's shelves, everything in Laurie's "studio" was neat and orderly, as befitted the spot devoted to the culture of the beautiful.

The same, alas! could not be said of the south side of the Look-out. Rex, poor boy! had frequent contentions—"rows," he called them—with neat old Auntie Blanche, and even with his quiet sister Edna, on account of the disorder, dirt, and foul smells that

characterized his share of the common work-room. It was well for everybody concerned that close beside Rex's window a door opened on the back stairs, so that the rule could in some measure be enforced that all the dirty work pertaining to the taxidermic art should be performed out of sight and smell of the rest of the family. A good-sized pine box stood up against the window, containing nobody but its owner knew what; two large brackets, one on either side, held cases of stuffed birds, while the skins of two or three small animals hung on the wall beneath these. Rex had his table also; it stood in front of the window, but out from it a little, so that he could sit on the box while he worked upon it. Bits of wire and wool were always scattered about on this table, to say nothing of spots of blood, feathers, and other unpleasant suggestions of Rex's occupation. A large and valuable work on natural history, that should have kept its place among the other books down stairs, was generally to be seen, with its bethumbed leaves spread open, either on or under this table.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY RECORD.

THE Pantops library was a gloomy room, darkened on the outside by trees planted too near the house, and inside by heavy curtains whose original hue was now a matter of uncertainty. Its high cases were filled with volumes dating back, for the most part, to years before the birth of the young people with whom our story has to do. Old law-books; Josephus; odd volumes of a commentary; Milton in faded binding and very yellow paper, printed with the long *f*'s of bygone-times; a few collections of poetry; a dozen novels of the romantic style of the past, which even the most sentimental young girl of to-day would fall asleep over; several rusty-looking annuals, side by side with dictionaries and worn-out school-books,—these formed the stock of literary treasures hidden away in the neglected library. Now and then, in her lone-

ly hours, while the boys were absent, Edna would steal into the dingy room and glance over the well-worn books that had been familiar companions of one and another of those relatives whose pictured faces gazed down upon her from the walls of various rooms. A glance was all she cared to give to any save one large volume bound strongly in calf-skin. With this under her arm she would often come out of the library, run up stairs to the Look-out Room, and, seated in her low rocking-chair by the west window, pore over its contents with an interest that often brought a glow of excitement to her cheeks or tears to her eyes.

This book was a "Record of the Willoughby Family." It had been begun by Edna's grandfather when he was a boy in his teens. The first pages, in stiff, angular characters, made almost illegible by many flourishes and the discoloring work of time on ink and paper, told the story of his race from the period of their leaving their noble English estate to settle in the wilderness of America. The various struggles passed through, the births, marriages, and deaths, all given as bare statistics, were by Edna's ready imagi-

nation seized as material for weaving a glowing romance. Indeed, the entire record was to her little more than a charming novel, until, passing over pages in ink of every shade and handwriting of every style, she came to the neat penmanship of her own mother. Here she read a description of Pantops as it appeared to the eyes of that mother when she came to it as a bride. In these pages her father figured as a hero without a fault. From other sources Edna had come to fear that he had possessed his share of human failings: it was far pleasanter to accept this charming portrait of him. Then came accounts of little journeys taken, dinner-parties, household plans; then the date of her own birth, with loving descriptions of her baby perfections—the day on which she had cut her first tooth, the date of the first step taken alone, and many other matters which only a young mother would take the trouble to note.

After this the entries grew shorter and more formal, for when the next baby came, sickened, and died there had been little leisure for Mrs. Willoughby to devote to the record. From time to time a line or two in bolder characters interrupted the dainty monotony of the young

mother's entries. These were statements of money-losses sometimes ; of plans that never had been carried out ; the dates of birth of Pierre, Laurence, and Rex. In between came the mother's affectionate accounts of each baby's wonderful accomplishments, of pretty garments worn by them. After Rex's first year came a blank ; the history passed from the hands of the loving mother, and two lines by her husband announced her death :

"At Pantops, June 20th, 18—, passed into life eternal Helen Willoughby, aged twenty-eight years."

Here was Edna's regular stopping-place for a cry. It was so pitiful, the thought of her mother, still young, leaving the home where she was so much needed, the little children so helpless and dependent on her. Edna's memory could fill up the blanks in the family story after this. There were a few entries in the old book stating in a business-like way the engagement or discharge of a servant, the date of certain repairs. These were made chiefly by an aunt of the young Willoughbys, who had several years back married a widower with one son and removed to some distant Western village. Edna never liked to dwell

on the period of childhood between her mother's death and this aunt's marriage. She had a painful memory of a long list of rules that she was for ever breaking, of long scoldings that took the place of pleasant nursery-songs, and a sense of restraint where all had been happy freedom. It had been a blessed day for Edna and her little brothers when Aunt Eliza had formally committed the family to the care of dear old Auntie Blanche, saying that if things did come to wreck and ruin now, her conscience was clear; she had done her duty by Henry's children long enough; they must learn to shift for themselves. Edna had been terrified by this grim speech, and the equally grim look on her aunt's face as she stood in the doorway and kissed them all around; she remembered how she had hid her face in Auntie Blanche's ample skirt and screamed as the stiff gray silk dress of the bride rustled along the path to the carriage in which she was borne away from Pantops.

Happy days succeeded. Auntie Blanche, with a single little maid to assist her, managed the establishment. Mr. Willoughby shut himself in the library, and was never seen by the children except at meals. Nobody was troubled

by that, for he had never put himself on familiar terms with his family. Edna could remember that her pretty dresses were hung away in the closets after this, that her hair was seldom curled, and her apron often sticky with little rills of molasses—that her brothers also went looking little better than the common children of the village. That mattered nothing; they had such good times romping out of doors in fine weather, and through the great house at their pleasure when it stormed. Auntie Blanche knew how to make them happy; what mattered anything else?

After a time Edna went to the village school; that was a great and not wholly welcome change. Its importance as an event sank into insignificance, however, by the speedy following of a much greater one—namely, her father's death. In itself, the loss of a parent who manifested so little interest in his children was not so great a sorrow, but it broke up the free, joyous life of the children under Auntie Blanche's charge. There was a general upsetting of things. People came to the house—relations Edna now supposed they must have been. They scolded Auntie Blanche and cried over the children; they made a fuss, which

even in her little girlhood Edna hated. They had sewing-women there who made numerous black garments, and these were put upon her sorely against her will. Then trunks were packed, and the child, lonely and sore-hearted enough, was sent away to boarding-school, while a nursery-governess was engaged for the boys. Auntie Blanche's authority after this was limited to household affairs.

Except during brief vacations after this, Edna saw nothing of home and brothers until she was sixteen. Then it was announced to her in a letter from her guardian that it was the wish of the late Mr. Willoughby that at this age she should return to Pantops and assume the charge of the family. Edna obeyed joyfully. Years afterward she realized what a burden of responsibility she had taken upon herself; but at sixteen who understands the full meaning of responsibility? and with a sewing-machine, a new cook-book, and Auntie Blanche what could she not do?

The date of her return had been duly noted in the family record; it was to be the commencement of a new era. A few pathetic entries after that from time to time showed that there were difficulties in the way of the young housekeeper

that even the possession of cook-book, sewing-machine, and Auntie Blanche could not unravel. Tear-blisters on the pages spoke louder than the words among which they formed a sort of archipelago. Things did not always go smoothly; the old housekeeper was obstinate in her ways, and would laugh scornfully at the innovations of "young missy." "Never heern tell o' no such doin's in my day, chile," was the frequent comment on Edna's practical application of theories learned from books; and with quiet obstinacy the old woman held to her own way. In spite of all, Edna gradually improved the appearance of the house. One of her special plans had been the fitting up of the Look-out Room for her brothers and herself, in which to spend their odd moments with profit by improving each one his particular talent.

At the period at which this story takes up the lives of the Pantops family they were a busy set of young people, and "odd moments" were scarce. The will of Henry Willoughby had been one of the wisest deeds of a notably unwise man. The remnant of property which he had not lived quite long enough to squander had by this will been divided equally among the

four children, except that in addition to her portion the old homestead was given to Edna. Each boy received an annual sum liberal enough to meet all expenses of a good education up to the age of twelve. At that time they were expected to leave school and go to work. No appropriation was made for them from that time until they each reached his twenty-first year; meanwhile, they were to support themselves. Thus it came about that Pierre, now a little more than fifteen, was dependent on the salary he earned as clerk in the Questiford drug-store; Laurence, the artist-boy, to whom ordinary work was the sorest evil under the sun, had lately been driven by the terms of this inflexible will to undertake the duties of an office-boy at the printing-office of the *Questiford News*; Reginald, happy fellow! being only ten years old, had a long stretch still before him of peaceful study, and plenty of time—so reasoned his older brothers—to pursue his own schemes of happiness. These, to Rex, were long rambles in the woods at any hour, in any weather, in pursuit of animals, birds, and insects, either to catch and tame or kill and stuff, or, in more generous moods, only to study their ways of life.

As a family the Willoughbys kept very much to themselves; in consequence of this Questiford people considered them proud—"stuck up," as they expressed it. This censure was wholly unfounded; pride had no part in the composition of meek Edna Willoughby, and the boys' indifference to the society of others of their age resulted from the fulness of their lives, the all-absorbing interests which clustered around their home-life. While each had his special hobby, he was sure of the thorough sympathy and help of the rest of the family, from Edna to Auntie Blanche; and with such friends to encourage and aid these young people were quite independent of outside society. Rex, being a school-boy and a merry, social fellow, had a troop of friends. These, however, rarely ventured to visit him at his home. The most intimate companion of the boys was Reed Remsen, the long-legged, awkward fellow who had on the evening of the Pantops entertainment shown such eager interest in the performance. Reed's father was the blacksmith of Questiford; the boy worked in the shop—if his feeble exertions could be called work—and was expected, in course of time, to suc-

ceed to the hard labor and sure gains of that useful vocation.

Industry, however, was not one of Reed's virtues: he hated toil of every kind, but especially that sort which Providence pointed out as the reasonable and natural sort for him to do. He enjoyed slipping out of the shop every chance he found to the little stream behind it to fish. His chosen position was a knoll commanding a view of the busiest part of the long village street, and his eyes were ever on the watch for one of the Willoughbys. He knew to the moment when Rex would be out at recess; he kept a sharp lookout on the door of the drug-store when it came near the hour for Pierre to be free to go home to dinner; and was always at hand with his "Hallo, Laurie! where to now?" whenever and wherever the young printer chanced to show himself when business called him from place to place. If by accident Reed failed to get sight of the boys at the time expected, he occupied his too abundant leisure by strolling toward Pantops to inquire for them. This habit used to annoy Edna—that is, in the early days of this one-sided intimacy—for it was Reed's habit to go through the house from room to

room until he found some one, and not unfrequently she had stopped in the midst of her practice or sewing, startled by the sudden apparition of the lanky fellow standing in the doorway. Worse still, she had repeatedly been at her desk in the Look-out Room, completely engrossed in the story that was growing under her fingers, when a warning "Ahem!" would make her jump back to present realities in painful haste to discover Reed gazing at her with amused wonder and with the unvaried question on his lips, "Where are the boys?" In vain she and Auntie Blanche had endeavored to teach the lad better manners by polite hints; Reed, unaccustomed to such courteous treatment as mere hints that he was not wanted, took all in good part, and kept on his way in happy ignorance that others did not enjoy his visits as much as he did. At last Edna had to give up in despair and accept Reed as a necessary evil; she learned to let him come and go just as Victor did, and to continue her occupation without heeding his presence. This exactly suited Reed: the only person it failed to suit was Reed's father. "Them Willoughbys fairly 'witch the boy," complained the blacksmith to his cronies.

“His head gets chock full of picturs and chemycales and such like, and he’s no more use in the shop than the fifth wheel of a coach.” Words of comfort were sometimes offered in response to such remarks, to the effect that Reed was in good company and might pick up useful learning. This was not old Robby Remsen’s way of looking at things. “What,” he would retort, “did learning and gran’ notions ever do for the father of these ’ere Willoughbys, or their gran’ter either? No, give me the fellow that can roll up his sleeves and work; that’s better than all your learning, a hundred times.”

Time as it passed on showed more and more plainly that opinions do not descend from father to son by any law of inheritance. Reed became more and more the humble admirer of his friends at Pantops—his father more and more disheartened with his only son’s indifference to the honorable work of the blacksmith.

CHAPTER IV.

LAURIE'S TROUBLE.

AMONG the occupants of the Look-out Room there existed a convenient custom of naming each his own window and adjacent territory, and speaking of it as if it were a separate apartment. The united interests of the family centred now on one side of the room and now on another. Previous to the entertainment given by the brothers the evenings and odd moments during the day had found an eager group assembled in the Laboratory, called less pretentiously "Pierre's side." The experiments with which "Pierrotto Willinotto" puzzled the simple folk of Questiford on that occasion had all to be carefully tested beforehand, and the whole family, even to Auntie Blanche, were required to witness and criticise the young magician's scientific tricks before a larger audience should pass judgment upon them, Reed Remsen seldom failing to

make one of the company and to distract Pierre with his numberless questions.

The project of giving a public entertainment had originated with this same "fifth wheel of a coach," as his father called him; and this is the way it came about: Laurie had taken his portfolio one summer morning so bright and early that even the birds were not all yet awake—had crossed the rustic bridge and followed the stream to an abrupt turn, where, from a certain nook halfway up a hillside, he gained the loveliest view, as he thought, to be found in all the country. He seated himself and leisurely pulled the wild flowers within reach, enjoying to the full the loveliness spread out before him, with the comfortable assurance that he had an entire hour for sketching before Auntie Blanche's muffins and coffee would be ready for the breakfast-table. He sharpened his pencil to a nicety and began to work on the picture he had long beheld in fancy; it was to go far beyond any previous attempt, and if—ah! *if*—he could only succeed, it should be honored with the best frame he could procure in Questiford and be hung in the dining-room, opposite Edna's seat at table, so that she would be sure to enjoy it three times every day.

Laurie's happy meditations kept pace with the rapid strokes of his pencil, and he was getting on famously with both when, to his annoyance, a rustling among the bushes below announced an intruder on his privacy. Who beside himself could be so far beyond the limits of the village at this hour?

"Hallo, Laurie! Laurie, I say! where have you hid yourself?"

Laurie recognized the voice, and answered promptly, though sorely against his will, by a shrill whistle, revealing his whereabouts better than words. Instantly the long legs of the blacksmith's son brought him up to the artist's nook. He watched the work in its progress for a few moments in silence, then began his usual catechism:

"What ye goin' to put this side, Laurie?"

"Where is that little cloud you've put up there? I don't see none like that over-head."

"I don't think you've drawed that water now as well as you ought to; can't you do no better?"

Reed's head lowered closer to the work he was criticising with every question; by this time it was almost between Laurie's eyes and the paper.

The young artist did not feel so tranquilly content as he had done a few minutes before. "Indeed, I can't stop to answer all your questions, Reed," he said ; and the movement with which he tossed back the troublesome "bang" that kept falling over his eyes expressed the impatience that he would not allow his voice to show. "I am not doing this as nicely as if I were going to finish it up as a drawing, you see?"

Laurie glanced at his companion for a sign of assent, but a very blank look met his own.

"A drawing it is," said Reed discontentedly, "and not much of a one at that, however you finish it up. I could do 'most as well myself."

"Ah, but," responded Laurie with a smile, "I am only making an outline now ; to-morrow I shall bring my paint-box and begin the picture in earnest. It is to be a landscape in water-color," added he with some dignity.

"Oh-o-oh ! I see now !" exclaimed Reed, a new idea dawning upon him. "Now that will be something like the thing ! I was thinking 'twas a pity if you couldn't do no better than that 'ere. Well, now I see what

you're at, I b'lieve I'll take myself home and get some breakfast. Father'll be lookin' all over for me."

It was with a feeling of relief that Laurie heard this decision and saw the loose-jointed boy swing himself through the bushes and betake himself to the homeward road—a feeling which was checked as soon as it arose by the parting remark from Reed :

"I b'lieve I'll come along with you in the morning, seein' you're goin' to paint. I want to see how you do it. I don't like the notion of your comin' here by yourself; it's kinder lonesome. I'll be along."

Laurie bit his lip with vexation at himself for having said a word about to-morrow. "Reed is a perfect bore," he said aloud for the benefit of whatever birds and squirrels were within hearing. After a few minutes more spent on his sketch he put it in his portfolio and started for home likewise.

Reed was a boy of his word. He kept his voluntary engagement with Laurie, not only the next morning, but every succeeding morning so long as the picture was in progress.

To Laurence Willoughby there was a great charm in the work to which he had set him-

self. As the brush moved rapidly on, creating an ever-increasing likeness to Nature, he was unconscious of everything but the great happiness of being able to paint; he forgot Reed's presence, forgot himself, consequently forgot more than once that it was breakfast-time, and that Edna would be worried about him if he did not appear at the table. Once he became so engrossed that Reed left him in disgust at getting no response to his questions, and the result was that Laurie kept on working, until at last, rousing as from a dream, he realized by the position of the sun that it must be long past the usual time. He gathered up his brushes and scampered home. There he found breakfast over, the family separated for their work, and Edna standing at the window looking wistfully, but in the wrong direction, for him. He could not take time to eat anything, for already he was an hour late for the printing-office. The consequence of all this was that he came home at night with a severe headache and pains in his limbs. Auntie Blanche marched him up stairs, following with a tub of hot water for his feet, and talking all the way of the various remedies for a cold which her long experience had made her

familiar with. Edna came behind with a tumbler of something hot to drink, and Laurie was sent to bed with such a mingling of nursing, scolding, and comforting that he retained but one distinct idea, and that was that no hope remained of his getting out to paint next morning.

It was indeed several mornings before he felt able to rise earlier than was simply necessary for his getting down to the printing-office in season. At last, however, with Edna's unwilling consent, he set forth on his early stroll, and seated himself in the nook which had grown so pleasant to him while the picture had been in progress. This time Reed was not there, and it was with a sensation of perfect freedom that the boy opened his box of colors and took his picture in hand. But, alas! a great misfortune had befallen him: fully half his paints were missing; among them had gone his best and most useful colors. His accusing thoughts flew at once to Auntie Blanche. What more likely than that she should have been sweeping the Look-out Room, had upset his box, and had brushed the precious pieces of paint, as rubbish, into her dust-pan? Had the poor old colored woman

been present that moment, she would have heard such an outpouring of anger as seldom fell from the quiet boy's lips. But this misfortune was not brought about by any carelessness on the part of Auntie Blanche; and this Laurie soon discovered. A heavy shower had fallen since his last visit here, and just beyond where he stood gazing about in perplexity were a few specks of red and yellow, which he eagerly picked up. Search for the rest was useless; the rain had carried all away but these tiny fragments. These were sufficient to call to his remembrance an incident of his last visit here. When he had discovered the lateness of the hour he had grasped his implements with more haste than care, and had found a moment after starting homeward that his color-box was unfastened. This was the result.

The fact was, that Laurie's artist-materials were mere remnants of those his mother had used in her boarding-school days. He had found it hard work to make these answer before, and now all hope of finishing his beloved picture was taken away. He had long wished for a complete box of colors, with new brushes and palette, but had felt that he might as well

wish for a voyage to Europe or any other impossible thing. His earnings at the printing-office were barely enough to provide him with clothes, and the boy's heart was left to go hungry for all the delights of life for which he yearned. His father's scheme of saving his sons from the temptation of squandering money by withholding it until they had attained years of discretion had its ill effects as well as its good ones. Laurie had felt it a hardship that he could not get a new box of colors; in this moment of disappointment he would have been quite content could he restore to his box the cakes of paint washed away by the storm.

The morning was spoiled; the delight with which he had hurried to his retreat was changed to sorrow. He turned from the pleasant scene with slow steps. When nearly home he spied Reed coming to meet him.

"Out again, eh?" shouted the blacksmith's son. "I didn't know as you'd be goin' this morning, Laurie, or I'd have been on hand too. Let's see," said he as he turned back with his friend, "how much you've got done on the pictur since I saw it t'other day."

Upon this Laurie, sure at least of sympathy, told Reed his sad story, and felt a little com-

forted by the "Phews!" and "Well, I nevers!" with which the recital was interrupted. By the time they reached the Pantops gate the first distress was softened, and when, on parting, Reed placed his long fingers on Laurie's shoulder and whispered, "I'll stand by you, old fellow! I'll see you through!" the latter laughed aloud; the idea of Reed Remsen's standing by anybody or seeing any one through a trouble was so funny.

The project of finishing the landscape and hanging it where Edna could feast her eyes upon it while she presided at table was of course entirely overthrown. Laurie said not a word at home about his misfortune, as he had said not a word about his plan. The brothers and sister thought he had taken a foolish freak about early morning walks, and Edna had observed that he carried his paints along; now they supposed he was tired of the whim and chose wisely to take a longer nap instead. Reed alone was in his confidence, and that more by the accident of having met him when his heart was too full for silence than any choice on Laurie's part.

CHAPTER V.

REED REMSEN'S PLAN.

ON the way between Pantops and his father's shop Reed's sympathy took a practical turn. As he sauntered along with hands in his pockets and his round eyes staring at the tall white steeple of the meeting-house, his thoughts ran somewhat on this wise :

"Too bad about those paints ! Weren't worth much, the whole lot of 'em, but, my ! how bad the fellow does feel about it ! I wonder what's to be done ? Somethin' must be done ; the question is, *What ?* I'll sell my chickens ; that'll be the thing. No it won't, nuther ; he's so proud he wouldn't take the money. I'll ask dad to buy a paint-box next time he goes to —, and let me give it to Laurie. No, I won't do that, for dad wouldn't hear a word to it ; he's always down on the Willoughbys, 'cause he thinks they're proud."

There was a pause in the meditation ; the steeple did not seem in a mood to suggest any-

thing. Now he walked past the drug-store, and, looking in through the well-polished window, caught a glimpse of Pierre carefully pouring something from one bottle into another. "What a handy chap he is!" mused Reed, conscious that he himself was a good way from being handy. "He can do anything he undertakes. Now, to think of them 'ere experiments! I don't suppose there's another boy anywheres that's up to such things. Wonder when he'll find some more 'odd moments,' as he calls 'em, to work in his lab'ratory?"

"There! there! there! I see my way clear! Why didn't I think of that before? Splendid idea! Hurrah for Reed Remsen!" This was shouted at the top of his lungs, and some women who were walking ahead of him turned and stared at him, evidently thinking he was losing the little wit he ever had.

This brilliant idea held possession of Reed's mind all day; his father got no satisfactory help from him, and at last, being provoked beyond endurance by the lad's absent-mindedness, told him to clear out of the shop and not show his face there again that day. When Pierre stepped from the drug-store to go home for his tea the lanky form of "The Willoughby

shadow," as Reed was called now-a-days, approached him from the lamp-post, against which he had stood leaning.

"Good-evening, Reed."

"Evenin', Pierre."

At this point conversation halted a moment or two until the pair got in step and well started toward Pantops, for thither Reed was bound as a matter of course, since Pierre was. "Click ! clack ! click !" rang the young clerk's boot-heels on the brick sidewalk which adorned the business part of Questiford, and a muffled echo, that lacked all the clear-cut energy of the companion step, came from Reed's well-patched shoes.

"Pierre, I've got somethin' weighin' on my mind," said the latter.

Pierre laughed. "That sounds solemn, old fellow," said he ; "I hope your mind is strong enough to bear the weight."

"I'm not jokin', and you needn't laugh." Reed was very sensitive to ridicule, and from that very fact received a full share of it from his companions. Without waiting for further parley he plunged at once into his subject, and by the time they had reached the house Pierre was in possession of the story of Laurie's loss

and the novel method Reed had elaborated during the leisure of the holiday with which his father had punished him.

As a result, Reed was invited for the first time to stay to tea at Pantops. Too bashful to accept the courtesy, and too interested in his plan to decline being present while it was under discussion, he followed Pierre in and sat nervously on the edge of a chair, neither at the table nor away from it, and nibbled at the piece of ginger-cake which Edna hospitably placed in his hand, seeing that he steadily refused all that was offered him. There was another uneasy person present, and that was Laurie, who, when his elder brother began to tell the story of the paint-box to the rest of the family, flushed and paled by turns, and cast reproachful glances toward Reed. This was not because the boy kept any secrets from the rest; secrets, as such, were unknown at Pantops, and perfect confidence existed between the members of its little family circle. It was only a natural shyness that withheld Laurie from speaking of his own affair, and a slowness of speech that made it difficult to begin and tell a story through, even the simple one of his loss of the colors.

Edna's loving eyes had discovered that something was troubling Laurie, but she was too wise a sister to force a confidence. Her face lighted up as Pierre made known what to her did not seem a very serious loss.

"Paints are cheap things," said she. "I noticed lately a couple of very neat-looking boxes in Miss Trimble's window for twenty-five cents."

This speech made Pierre and Rex laugh heartily, while Laurie's lips twitched with a movement that had nothing in common with laughter, and his eyes filled with tears.

"You can buy a box for two cents; that's cheaper yet," said Rex, whose interest was equally divided between the conversation and Victor's plaintive whines for a share of his master's meal.

Seeing that his information did not meet with warm response, he continued: "They're first-rate, those two-cent boxes. I've got nearly all the pictures in my geography painted with 'em. I've got part of a box in my coat-pocket—traded off two marbles to Jim Gray for it this afternoon. Laurie can have it if he likes."

"Thank you, Rex," Laurie managed to say,

“but the kind of box I want would cost five dollars. I priced one when Edna and I were in ——. It’s no use talking any more about it.”

“It is a great deal of use talking about it, sir,” said Pierre with a meaning smile that gave emphasis to his words. “You shall have a box of paints costing five dollars if there is as much talent in this family as I give it credit for.”

Everybody’s attention was secured by this bold speech, and Pierre went on to tell of Reed’s excellent plan. This was simply that each brother should make use of his special talent in getting up an entertainment, the proceeds of which were to purchase a new set of colors for the artist-boy. The result of the conversation which followed has been told at the outset.

When Pierre had explained Reed’s novel idea, and had announced his own hearty approval and readiness to do his part, several moments of silence followed, for everybody began thinking. It was Auntie Blanche, standing turbaned and dignified behind her young mistress’s chair, who first spoke.

“Come, come, chil’n,” said she, “dis yer’ll never do; won’t get my dishes washed up ’fore

bed-time: If yer wants any more supper, jes' you eat; if ye're done, git up an' go to de parlor."

There was a laugh and an immediate obedience to the old cook's command, and by the time the party were seated in the parlor every tongue was loosed and opinions began to be freely interchanged.

"Pierre's experiments are really worth looking at," said Laurie dejectedly, "but I can do nothing to entertain people."

"Can't you, though?" interrupted Rex. "The fellows at school think that portrait of Victor beats everything, and they like the landscapes too, but not so much; it's mostly the girls that admire those."

Laurie's bang was tossed back with an excited gesture: "And how, I'd like to know, do the boys and girls at school know anything about my pictures? Have they been here, any of them?"

"No; don't be cross, old fellow, don't," said Rex, dreading his quiet brother's displeasure. "I took your portfolio to school one day and showed them the pictures. I'm proud of you, Laurie; don't be angry with me for that."

"I'm not angry, of course, but I'm sorry

you did it, Rex, all the same. I haven't done anything yet worth the showing— But I mean to," he exclaimed with a sudden change from despondency to hope. "If only I *could* get a nice box of colors I would paint something better than I ever have done yet."

"You shall have your box of colors; trust me for that, Laurie," said the hopeful Pierre.

"I can show off my stuffed birds and the rest; that's all I can do for you, Laurie," said Rex with a sigh.

"First rate, Rex! they're well worth seeing," said Pierre; and Edna added, "Why not let Victor do his part too? He loves Laurie, and his talents are quite equal to those of the rest of the family."

Victor had been lying on the rug before the fire absorbed in his own meditations, but when Edna mentioned his name he pricked up his ears and listened attentively; when she ceased speaking he rose and gave himself a great shake, then walked deliberately across the room to where Rex stood, and, standing on his hind legs, offered him his paw.

"All right, sir," said Rex, shaking the paw: "you mean that you will show off all your tricks for Laurie's sake, don't you?"

Victor's low whine and glance toward Laurie were sufficient answer. Taking him at his word, his master made him go through a private rehearsal at once.

"I wish we could all do our parts as well as Victor," said Laurie soberly.

While the dog was showing off his antics Reed had slipped from the room unobserved, and after quite a long absence returned with a small roll of paper in his hand, which he gave to Laurie without saying a word.

"Why, Reed, where did you find this? How came you to remember?" asked Laurie with surprise.

Reed stood before him with his hands in his pockets and chuckled.

"What is it?" asked Edna; and then Pierre and Rex came nearer, and all standing around Reed asked what he had found.

"I told him I'd see him through, and I'm a goin' to, I am!" said Reed solemnly.

Edna had taken the roll of drawing-paper from Laurie's hand and opened it on the table. At one end were painted two small landscapes side by side—bits of Eastern scenery evidently—while a third, narrow and long, as were also the others, was dimly traced in pencil. She

did not understand it. Reed, who was forgetting all his bashfulness in his excitement about this plan of his, came to her side and explained :

“ He never knew as I was takin’ notice, but I watched him all the way through. It’s a good while ago, marm ” (Reed always addressed Edna as “ marm ”), “ and it was up in the Look-out Room. Laurie got a book—it was full of picturs—and he began copyin’ them, only he made his larger and prettier, ’cause them in the book warn’t painted, and his’n were. Then he took some little rollers and wound long strips of paper around ’em to see if they’d work. I couldn’t tell, ye see, marm, exactly what he was drivin’ at, ’cause I only watched, askin’ no questions, but I’m sure it was somethin’ grand. Well, one day he was a-workin’ and I a-lookin’, and, ’cause the thing didn’t jest suit him, he threw the rollers in the stove, and these picturs he tossed in the trash-basket. Now, I don’t care nothin’ for picturs, but, thinks I, he’s put out with himself now, and don’t care what he does, and he’ll be sorry some day. So I watches my chance and gets the picturs out of the basket and puts ’em in my pocket. Laurie never

knew;" and here the recital was interrupted by a long, happy chuckle. "You see, marm," said Reed, "he made an ugly tear in that sky, but I took it home and mended it up.—Now," turning to Laurie, "I guess as how you'll thank me for savin' 'em for you."

"Why, Reed, I am not so sure of that," answered Laurie. "What do you expect me to do with them now?"

"Go to work like a man and finish up your pan—panny—panory— Pshaw! I can't think what it was you called the thing."

"Panorama, was it?" asked Edna, beginning to comprehend and to put together Reed's story, the roll with its pictures at one end, and the memory of a certain entertainment of that sort which she and Laurie had attended during their visit to —, at which time also Laurie had priced the paint-box.

"You ingenious fellow!" exclaimed Edna, with an appreciation of her brother's effort not as common among older sisters as it ought to be.

Laurie joined the group at the table who were examining the discarded work. With all his shyness and lack of hope a few words of encouragement were to this boy like drops

of oil to delicate machinery; they smoothed away difficulties and put him in working order at once.

"You remember the panorama of Palestine we went together to see, eh, Edna?"

"Indeed I do, and you are going to make it in miniature. Why, Laurie, that will be charming! With Pierre's chemical surprises and Rex's stuffed creatures, that will come in nicely, I don't see but that you have a programme all prepared."

"What was the trouble before?" asked Pierre. "Perhaps I can help you with it."

"Thank you. How good you all are!" said Laurie with a grateful glance around the circle of friendly faces. "I can manage it if I try, and I will try to-morrow morning, see if I don't! I could not make it turn nicely on the rollers; but I can now, I'm sure."

Reed Remsen strolled homeward that evening in the moonlight, alternately whistling and repeating to himself, "Lucky thing I saved that 'ere panny-what-you-call-it! I'll see him through it, I will!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LABORATORY.

IT is not to be supposed that the plans and conversations which have filled the preceding chapters occupied much of the time of the busy family in whose affairs we are interested. With the exception of the lanky Reed Remsen all the people we have to deal with were busy workers. From morning till night, with only the interval of an hour at noon, Pierre's thoughts were intent on mixing medicines, serving customers, and making himself generally useful to his employer. Laurie saw no pictures in the dingy little printing-office, where his duties were of a very uninteresting character, as any one knows who has ever taken notice of the daily routine of an office-boy in a small country town. Rex thought his days crowded to the utmost with hard examples and tedious rows of spelling, and grudged himself even the recreation of a game at ball with his companions, so eager was he

to gain every possible "odd moment" for hunting or practising his art of taxidermy.

The noon following the evening on which Reed Remsen's plan was proposed and approved the Look-out Room was filled with odors and confusion. The studio, the study, the museum—as the other three portions of the apartment were named—were banished for the time, or rather merged into one grand workshop for the aspiring chemist. Bottles and strange-looking apparatus covered Edna's desk, Laurie's table, and even jostled the stuffed birds on Rex's brackets. Pierre was then merely getting things "in order" for evening work; he had not many odd minutes in the middle of the day. It is true he stole them sometimes from dinner, and grieved Edna not a little by catching a piece of bread or other portable article from the table and hurrying with it to the Look-out Room, utterly regardless of the meal prepared for him or his duties at table as eldest brother.

On this particular evening the family were exhorted by Pierre not to eat too much or sit too long at their supper talking, since they all were wanted to see and criticise certain experiments with which he proposed to entertain the

Questiford public. Reed was on hand of course, and Auntie Blanche, after her work was done up, dragged her rheumatic old limbs up the stairs, "Jes' for to see that them chil'n didn't set the house afire." As she entered the room a loud crackling sound came from she knew not where, and little flashes issued from Pierre's hands. The old woman threw her apron over her face and screamed ; it was with difficulty that Edna soothed her and assured her that the noise was not thunder and that the house had not been struck by lightning. It was not until Laurie opened a window and bade her look out at the shining stars and clear blue sky that she was convinced of her safety.

Reed meanwhile was on his knees beside Rex's table, whereon Pierre was working with pestle and mortar.

"What's that, Pierre?" "What do you do that for?" "What you goin' to do next?" "Why do you pound it?" "What is this made of?" "Are you sure it ain't agoin' to blow us all up?" These were the beginning of Reed's questions.

"Don't talk, Reed ; you bother me," said Pierre, who in his anxiety about his experi-

ments was growing nervous. "I'll explain everything I do if you'll only be still."

Reed, subdued by these words, but in no wise offended, watched more intently than before, but kept silence. Pierre tried the experiment twice, and was pleased at the effect, until Edna drew his attention to Auntie Blanche, who was actually pale with fright and gave a little scream at every report.

"I would not put that on the programme, Pierre," said Laurie. "People won't be willing to pay for being frightened."

"I won't, then," said the other with a feeling of compassion for the scared black face before him.—"Now," added he, turning to Reed, "I'll tell you how that was done; it is very simple. This"—and he put a harmless-looking crystal from one of his bottles into his companion's hand—"is called chlorate of potash. You saw me put one of these in the mortar and pound it to a powder. Then I took half as much of this, which is powdered sulphur, and threw it in with the other, and rubbed both together pretty briskly, as you saw; and that was what caused the thunder and lightning that frightened Auntie Blanche so."

"Don't cotch me touchin' them curus consarns o' yourn no more, Marse Pierre," said the old woman with an unsteady voice; "let 'em get covered with dirt fust."

This threat pleased Pierre greatly, and he rejoiced in his heart that the old cook had received so thorough a fright.

"Let me try, Pierre," said Reed. "I'll do exactly as you did; may I?"

"No, don't you touch!" "Please don't!" and "Better not meddle!" were the responses from different members of the party; and Reed had to be content with the use of his eyes.

"I won't make thunder, then," said Pierre, "if it is so terrible, but I suppose nobody will be alarmed at a few lightning-flashes?"

Without waiting for an answer he caused a bright gleam to light up the room for an instant.

"How do you do it, Pierre?" Edna asked, shielding her eyes with her hand as she spoke, in anticipation of another flash.

"Come here, sis, and I'll let you do it yourself," said the chemist.

Auntie Blanche, however, leaned forward and grasped Edna's skirt as she rose to go to the table: "Do ye think, missy, that I'm

goin' to let you blow yourself up before my very face and eyes this way?"

"Oh, auntie, see how you've ripped my dress!" exclaimed the young lady with a shade of annoyance; but she resigned herself to the old woman's wishes and took her seat again. Reed joyfully availed himself of Pierre's permission to try the experiment, and stood up beside him. Seeing this, Auntie Blanche gave a groan and shuffled to the door, muttering that if she was to be killed, it should be by "Marse Pierre's own self, and not by that crazy good-for-naught." It was a relief to all when she departed.

Pierre now put something in Reed's hand. "It is lycopodium," he explained, laughing. "I don't see as it will be much use to you, my telling you these names, but you seem to want to know all about it."

"Likypojum?" echoed the pupil. "What do I do with it?"

"Put it into this little tube," said the teacher; "hold it right before the candle—that's right; now blow gently."

Reed obeyed, and the mimic lightning flew about the room, giving to every face a startling pallor. He dropped the tube, terrified at his

own success, and got down on his knees again, with no further inclination, for that evening at least, to play the magician.

"How will that do for our entertainment?" asked Pierre.

The verdict of the spectators was in favor of this experiment, so Pierre made a note of it on a slip of paper headed "Magician's Programme." Then he bustled about a moment in search of a handleless tea-cup, which Edna declared he had once broken on purpose, to get possession of it for his experiments. Into this, as Reed observed, he put two kinds of powder; then he seemed to merely touch the dry powder with the end of a glass rod, and immediately a very brilliant illumination took place.

"How's that?" asked Pierre.

"Better than gas-light," answered Laurie.

"Why, Pierre," said Edna, "'seems to me it would save Auntie Blanche a good deal of trouble about filling and cleaning lamps to constitute you the light-maker for the family."

"You would find my sort of light more expensive than the kerosene, Edna, and not so convenient to sew or read by."

"Do explain to us how that was done," begged Laurie with increasing interest.

Pierre, well pleased at the request, showed Laurie the contents of the cup: "That is half chlorate of potash, and half fine white sugar pilfered from Edna's sugar-bowl at tea-time. I mixed them together thoroughly. Then I dipped the glass rod into sulphuric acid.—I cheated you there, Reed, didn't I? You did not see me do that?" Reed shook his head. "The merest touch of the sulphuric acid to the powdered sugar and chlorate of potash causes a flame. Now you all know as much about it as I do."

"It is very wonderful," said Edna.

"I guess I shall have to make it seem more wonderful still if we carry out our project," said Pierre, "and bewilder our neighbors by shaking a wand and pronouncing some words in an unknown tongue. That is the way with the prestidigitators, as they call themselves."

"That's it, Pierre!" said Rex. "Just use a few of those big words and dress up fancy, and you'll bewilder them, sure."

It is already known that Rex's advice was thoroughly approved and carried out when the occasion arrived.

"I wonder what else I can show them for Laurie's benefit?" mused Pierre, taking down one bottle after another in doubt, and finally seizing his much-worn Chemistry and turning over its leaves in search of an idea. "There are plenty of surprising effects to be produced, but then many of them need to be examined closely; and that won't do."

"I wish you could get up a magician's box," said Rex, "out of which would tumble roses and candies and all sorts of things that nobody would expect. That's the way to make people laugh."

"A good idea, Rex!" replied the elder brother. "I'll see if I can contrive that very thing."

Rex looked in Pierre's face with round eyes of surprise. He had not made his suggestion with any thought of it being a possibility.

"I think of one little amusing experiment, and I will try it if— Do you think, Edna, that Auntie Blanche has left a few drops of hot water in her kettle?"

Before Edna had time to answer Reed's long legs had taken him to the door, and he was down to the kitchen and back again with a small pitcher of the desired hot water in a

marvellously short time. Pierre then put some of it in a test-tube, and dissolved therein a crystal of bluestone or sulphate of copper. He then took his pocket-knife and plunged its bright blade into the blue liquid. When he took it out Laurie exclaimed, "Oh what a pity, to spoil your nice knife! I have an old one in my pocket that would not have been much loss."

Pierre made no reply, but quietly rubbed the knife on one of the many bits of rag that he kept handy, and held it out as clean and bright as before.

This experiment seemed to cause more wonder among the group, although less startling, than any of the others.

"Explain it, do!" said Edna.

"Why, Edna, I never knew you felt any interest before in my hobby, as you call it." Pierre spoke with pleased surprise.

"I fear I have not shown any enthusiasm," admitted Edna. "I have seen you working away at your side of the room while I at my own window was busy thinking of other matters, and so have not taken these things in. I wish I knew enough about chemistry to appreciate the experiments better."

"I wish I had time to teach you, and you time to learn," exclaimed the brother, with enthusiasm enough to make up for the lack which she deplored. "But you want to know the secret of this transformation? It is easy enough. The sulphate of copper, acting upon the metal, produces the bright red color of metallic copper. If I had put the knife-blade again in the liquid and left it there, you would have seen the blueness disappear and a brown powder would have been deposited—copper, you see. Then, had I put a clean piece of iron in the solution, no further red deposit would have appeared, showing that all the copper had been previously thrown down."

"Too deep for me!" yawned sleepy Rex. "I think it's funny, though, so don't scowl at a fellow."

The evening had passed very pleasantly to this group of young people, and when they closed the door of the Look-out Room and went down stairs, it was with a hopeful prospect in regard to the proposed entertainment. Pierre could carry out his share of it, at all events.

All this has been a glance backward. We already know the reception the celebrated con-

jurer met from the Questiford audience. We know that Laurie's work at the once-rejected panorama succeeded in impressing the Bible scenes which he pictured on the minds of the young spectators; we have seen too that Victor and Victor's master did their part well in preparing for a public exhibition. We may imagine, too, that Edna's fingers were busy in preparing the magician's Eastern garb, and in filling up the little details of the whole, which the boys, boy like, overlooked.

Laurie got his paint-box. It must be owned that the admission fees of five cents were not sufficient to buy the kind which the artist had fixed his hopes upon, but the loving elder sister opened her purse as well as her heart on Laurie's behalf; so that one day, when he came to his table in the Look-out Room searching for a piece of rubber, he found there the precious treasure he had longed for, a well-ordered, neatly-filled paint-box.

Again there came a period of early morning walks and hours of delight in the chosen nook on the hillside. This time there was the added happiness of being alone—a very important matter to a boy of Laurie's disposition.

CHAPTER VII.

EDNA'S SORROWFUL DAY.

EDNA stood at the open kitchen-door one May morning beating eggs. It was Laurence's thirteenth birthday, and this good elder sister was intent on preparing for him the most delicious pudding described in her cook-book. Auntie Blanche, from the sink where she was busy washing the 'breakfast-dishes, turned more than once to look at the plump little figure enveloped in a large work-apron and say to herself what a "wunnerful smart young missy" she was.

"Flop! flop! flop!" went the eggs as their snowy drifts piled higher and higher under the steady motion of Edna's arm, and the young housekeeper's thoughts kept time with the regular beat of the fork, as if it had been a song she was singing to an accompaniment on the piano.

"How sweet the spring air is! how pretty

the yard is beginning to look ! My seeds here all come up splendidly. How happy we all are here in dear old Pantops ! Nobody else has such good brothers as I. I am so glad there is nobody that has a right to come here and upset things !” This last thought grew from the circumstance that a child in her Sunday-school class had confided to her the day previous of the coming home of a certain cousin Ann who made everybody mind her, from “dad” down to the baby, and who put a stop to all their good times. “Poor little Moll !” thought Edna with a sigh of sympathy. “It must be dreadful to have a cousin Ann.” She stepped outside the door, and held up a spoonful of the fluffy substance to see if it were frothed enough, when the sound of a slouching step coming around the side of the house made a pause in work and thinking. She looked up, and Reed Remsen was coming toward her with a letter in his hand. His appearance surprised her, for it was mid-morning, a time when Reed should, if ever, be in the blacksmith-shop at work. Besides this, Pierre generally got the mail early, but kept it until his return at the dinner-hour. She set down the dish on the old settle that stood against the house, and

sprang forward to take the letter from Reed's hand.

"Why did you come? Is there any bad news? Did Pierre send you?"

These fast-flowing questions quite bewildered the slow-working mind of the messenger, and for a moment or two he leaned against the grape-arbor and stared with that peculiar absence of all expression so aggravating when one is seeking for information. Edna tore open the letter, looked at the signature, and had read to the third page by the time the blacksmith's son had collected his ideas and was ready to express them:

"Nuthin' wrong whatever. I happened to be passing along the street as Pierre come out the post-office, and says I, 'If there's anything—papers or such—to go to Pantops, I'd as lieve drop in with 'em as not.'"

"Thank you, Reed: I'm much obliged," said Edna, now quite absorbed in the letter.

"Pierre said as how he couldn't make out the post-mark, and didn't know who 'twas from, and, as 'twas for you, I might as well bring it along."

Reed lingered several moments, still leaning against the grape-arbor, for a response from

Edna, but failing to attract her attention, he shuffled himself back to the road and on to the shop, where his long-suffering father was watching for him to come and give him a helping hand.

"Missy," called Auntie Blanche from within the kitchen, "time dat 'ere puddin' o' yourn was ready; oven's jes' 'zackly right for't. Laws! honey, what ails ye, lookin' so glum?"

Edna had finished her letter, but still stood with it open before her, thinking of its contents, and, as Auntie Blanche expressed it, looking "glum." She did not notice the old cook as her turbaned head appeared at the door—did not see that the dish of eggs was removed from the settle. In fact, she had forgotten all about Laurie's birthday-pudding, and was wandering out among the garden-paths in a dreamy mood, while Auntie Blanche was mixing up a pudding after her own mind. When the striking of the great clock in the dining-room brought her back to present realities, she hastened to the kitchen to find that the pudding was in the oven and all trace of its preparation removed from the table. Nothing remained for her to do, so Edna threw herself down in a chair and burst out crying.

At sight of this down went an armful of wood that Auntie Blanche was about to put in the stove, and a pair of motherly old arms were clasped around Edna's neck: "Now, missy, you've jes' got to tell nursey all about it. What brought that long-legged boy here to torment you? Where did the letter come from?"

Thus questioned, Edna straightened herself up and read aloud the letter.

This commenced, "DEAR NIECE AND NEPHEWS WILLOUGHBY," and was signed, "Your faithful aunt, ELIZA SCHENCK." The writing was cramped and irregular—for Mrs. Schenck had never been much of a scribe in her best days—but sufficiently distinct to set forth its unwelcome news beyond the comfort of a doubt.

In the years that had passed between the rustling of the bridal silk dress into the carriage at the gate of Pantops and the present hour no communication had taken place between the young Willoughbys and this, in every sense, far-off aunt. A host of unpleasant recollections of childish sorrows under her rule flashed upon Edna's mind as she read and re-read her aunt's words. In short,

clear-cut sentences, and without any waste of sentiment, Mrs. Schenck made it known to her young relatives that she had lost her husband, and was thus left a widow with small means, and her step-son to care for, in a rough Western town where the late Mr. Schenck had made and lost a fortune. "He was too much like your poor father," wrote the widow, "and did not know how to manage for himself. We all might have been in the poor-house long ago if it had not been for me." The writer hoped her brother's children had made out to get along without her care during the past years. She had tried to do her duty by them before they were providentially separated, and now that circumstances had left her free to decide on her future, she proposed to resume that duty. Her small annuity added to theirs would help them to keep house together in a style more consistent with the dignity of the Willoughbys than had been the case in her poor brother's lifetime, and her son John—who was about the age of Pierre—would be a companion for the boys. The aunt proceeded to inquire what servants Edna had, adding that no doubt, even if alive, the old colored woman they used to have must now be too infirm for house-work.

"Too infirm, eh?" repeated Auntie Blanche indignantly when Edna, without forethought, read this part of the letter. "I'm not too infirm to look after my own dear missus's chil'n, as Mis' Schenck'll find out when she gits back." Then the rough old hands stroked the girl's soft hair, and tears gathered in the deep furrows of the old cook's face as her thoughts too went travelling along the road of future trials which had engaged Edna's thoughts when she wandered about the garden forgetful of Laurie's birthday-pudding.

But the pudding was baked, and the welcome shouts of the returning boys dried the tears on both faces and brought both the old woman and the young one back from anticipated trials to present duties and pleasures.

Edna's swollen eyelids did not pass unnoticed at the table, and at once the boys began to question her.

Rex asked wistfully, "Is it because I didn't clear up the litter in the museum?"

"Better call your division of territory the muss-'eum, Rex," said Pierre. "You ought to select some other hobby not quite so dirty."

"*Was* it that, Edna?" again inquired the loving little boy.

Edna shook her head, and became very busy helping the family to potatoes.

"I know," exclaimed Laurie. "It's that little May in the story she is writing. She read part of it to me yesterday. May was taken ill on the last page, and I guess she's been killing her this morning. No wonder she is sorry."

Edna laughed with the rest at Laurie's supposition, and told him not to be uneasy about May, as she had given her the measles in order to bring about a journey to the mountains for her restoration—that there she was to meet her friend Miss Ethrington again, and all was to go smoothly to the close of the story.

"We are all glad to hear that poor little May is so well provided for, since she was obliged to have the measles," said Pierre. "Now I want to ask about that letter I sent by Reed. I could not make out the post-mark, and did not recognize the writing. If there was any one nearly enough connected with us to cause you anxiety, I should fear that there was bad news."

Here Edna drew the letter in question from her pocket and handed it to Pierre with the request that he would read it aloud.

"Not till I've had my slice of Laurie's birthday-pudding," said Pierre. "I was in the kitchen just now and saw Auntie Blanche take it out of the oven. What lovely puddings you do make, Edna!"

Edna was sorry to be obliged to disclaim this compliment, so far as it concerned the present proof of her ability, for nothing in the world was sweeter to her ears than praise of her housekeeping achievements from one of her brothers.

The pudding was eaten and pronounced "tip top," to the great satisfaction of good Auntie Blanche, and then came the letter. The boys listened with interest, but without any of the sorrow which their sister's swollen eyelids expressed.

"She hopes we have made out to get along without her, eh?" repeated Rex. "Why, I don't remember any aunt Eliza at all; I, for one, have made out first-rate without her all my life."

"You were a baby, Rex, when she was married and went away.—But, Pierre, you were old enough to recollect; I am sure you must," said the sister.

"Yes, I believe I do. Isn't she tall and

thin, with eyes that turn you inside out when she looks at you?"

Edna nodded, and the tears came again.

"A pleasant prospect for us all, eh, Rex?" said Laurie. "I suppose Aunt Eliza will treat us as you do your beasts and birds when you get them ready to stuff. Better look out, sir; she'll turn the museum out of doors quick enough. I don't believe she feels any interest in the pursuit of science."

"I wonder," said Pierre, "what kind of boy our cousin John is? If he happens to be of the right sort, it will be very pleasant for us.—Do you remember him, Edna?"

"I never saw him but once, Pierre, and that was when he was very small. All I can recall about the child was that he monopolized all the playthings, and screamed whenever you ventured to touch one. I was angry enough because he pulled the tail off your rocking-horse and tied it under his chin for whiskers."

"He is probably a good deal pleasanter by this time," said Pierre. "As for whiskers, he can afford to wait now for his own to grow."

"I hope he likes pictures," said Laurie.

"I hope he likes fun," exclaimed Rex.

"I hope he'll prove a good fellow, whatever

he likes, that will be good company for us," said Pierre.—"Anyhow, I don't see the use of feeling bad about it, Edna. If Aunt Eliza has made up her mind to come and take care of us, we can't very well help it; so let us receive her with the best grace we can, and make the best of it. You will always be the head of the family in my eyes, sis."

As he spoke Pierre went to Edna's seat at table, where she was dreamily playing with her knife and fork instead of eating her pudding, and gave her a hearty kiss. The other boys followed his example, then seized their hats and were off to store, office, and school. Edna made no haste to rise from the table, but sat with her head on her hand, giving way to sorrowful forebodings, until Victor came to beg for his dinner and startled her by licking her face in mute token of sympathy. She was brought back to things present by the touch of his rough tongue, and at once set about collecting the scraps of food on a plate for his benefit. Auntie Blanche came in while she was so engaged, and with a quick perception of her young missy's state of mind inquired if she had heard within a day or so how little Job Hendricks was getting along. Job was

a poor deformed little fellow at the other end of the village who was subject to "bad turns," as people said, and was now suffering from one of these. Edna had not heard from him.

"Then, honey, s'pose you pick a few posies for him while I put the rest of dis yer puddin' in a basket, along with a few o' them little cakes you made yesterday? It'll please the poor thing wunnerful now, missy, an' do you a heap o' good, too. Come now!"

Thus exhorted, Edna gave Victor an affectionate pat and went to the garden in search of the bunch of flowers. Auntie Blanche's suggestions were generally carried out, and her rule, though an unconscious one, was hardly less complete than during the childhood of Edna and her brothers. By the time the flowers were picked and arranged the basket of good things was also ready, and Edna sauntered along the path and passed from under the shadow of the great elms, impressed, in spite of inward gloom, with the beauty which God spreads over the world each spring-time as a fresh revelation of his goodness.

She would greatly have preferred the soli-

tude of her study in the Look-out Room, and would, if the wise old nurse had let her alone, have taken her pen in hand to kill off little May with the measles and close the story with a series of calamities in harmony with her present state of mind. The soft air of spring cooled her face, and her nerves too, as she walked along; the great puff-balls of white cloud above her, sailing in the blue depths of the sky, and the vivid freshness of the grass under her feet, alike soothed and refreshed her perturbed spirit; so that by the time she reached the cottage where little Job Hendricks lay restless and suffering she was ready to give him, along with the flowers and cakes, looks and words of cheer that did more to make him happy than they. Coming out again from the shadow of Job's sick room into the sunshine, and from the thoughts of his unbrightened life to the knowledge of the fulness of her own, Edna's feelings in regard to her aunt's coming were considerably modified. Aunt Eliza might not be so grim as her childish memory had pictured her; besides, she would naturally take the responsibility of housekeeping matters, and so let her be altogether free for her beloved story-making. Then the un-

known cousin, *if* of the right sort, would add greatly to the social enjoyment of the family. These advantages, Edna began to think, would counterbalance much that was disagreeable, and, after all, it might be the very best instead of the very worst thing that was about to befall them.

When the family gathered around the supper-table it was with a smiling instead of a tearful face at the head, and, as Pierre remarked, it was much more desirable to be in need of sun-shades than umbrellas. Rex begged Edna to drink but one cup of tea, and not pass the cake-basket around, because he had a colony of ants under consideration out beside the summer-house, and he wanted the rest to come out and look at them before it grew dark. Reed Remsen was already waiting for them at the door.



"Rex begged Edna to drink but one cup of tea, and not to pass the cake-basket around."



CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT SCHENCK.

EDNA stood under one of the great elm trees one afternoon in the early part of June, casting anxious glances along the road by which the stage from —— was expected. It came in sight with a cloud of dust ; it stopped at the gate ; the steps were let down ; and Edna's hand was extended to grasp that of a big boy who sprang from the vehicle. This must be John Schenck, by courtesy her cousin. She gained but a glimpse at the face, for it was turned instantly back to the coach, and the hand also, to assist the other passenger to alight.

“This is Aunt Eliza?” and Edna tried her best to put a tone of hearty welcome in her voice.

“Aunt Schenck, if you please. I consider it only proper respect to my husband's memory that you should call me by his name.”

"Certainly, Aunt Schenck." A sensitive ear would have detected a trifle less heartiness in this than in Edna's former words, but the tall lady now standing, bag in hand, within the Pantops gate had not a sensitive ear.

"John can see to the trunks and all that," said the lady. "I am fairly beat out with the journey; if my room is ready, I'll go right away to it, Edna.—I suppose you are Edna?"

A pair of very keen eyes searched the girl's face; and Edna, as she gave assent, remembered Pierre's question, "Isn't she tall and thin, with eyes that turn you inside out when she looks at you?" Except for the change from the gray silk dress of the bride to the mourning garb of widowhood, this was the same Aunt Eliza—henceforth Aunt Schenck—whose departure from Pantops had been a joyful event to the little Willoughbys years before.

Mrs. Schenck walked briskly up the path to the open hall-door, where, with clean apron and spotless white turban, Auntie Blanche awaited her with a respectful courtesy.

"How d'ye do, Blanche? So you're here yet?"

The old servant of the Willoughbys had received the title of respect, "auntie," from two generations of the family, but "Miss 'Liza" had not even in her youth given in to a custom which she said had no sense in it.

"'Seems to me your brothers' might have shown me a little more politeness." They stood in the hall, and Mrs. Schenck was busy shaking the dust from her dress as she spoke. Edna made the best apology she could for the boys, saying they were not at liberty at that hour, but would pay their respects to her at supper-time.

"Hm!" was all the response vouchsafed.

Meanwhile, John had paid the driver and had helped bring in the trunks, and the travellers were immediately shown to their rooms. While they were left to refresh themselves, Edna hurried to the Look-out Room "to get her thoughts together," as she told Auntie Blanche, but, as the latter shrewdly suspected, to have a good cry. It seemed to her that she had been there but a few minutes, though really it had been a full hour, when a noise of doors being opened and shut made her lift her head from her hands, conscious that she

was on the point of being interrupted in her revery. Somebody was groping up the back steps that by common consent belonged to the museum. Edna roused herself and opened the door to give some light on the ascent.

"Phew! bah!—Goodness, Edna! what kind of a place is this? Don't you ever have these steps scrubbed down? It smells like—Phew! Wait till I get things fairly under way! I don't have any such smells where I'm mistress, I tell you." There was a prolonged emphasis on the "you" that was meant to be impressive, and it was.

Edna mutely offered her aunt her own low chair, and handed her a fan; then she stood by, waiting for the lady to become more composed, and finally began to explain matters.

"You don't say that you allow that boy to do all such dirty work up here? Well! it is high time for me to come and see to things! The very idea of such carelessness! Why, Edna, how old are you?"

The gray eyes fixed their gaze on Edna with cold and curious scrutiny, from which the sensitive girl shrank, but she answered, "I was twenty last October, Aunt Schenck."

"Hm! This room was a very different-

looking place in my day," remarked Mrs. Schenck after a moment's silence. "What are all those bottles and things over there? I shall have them moved off to the garret to-morrow."

"Oh no! no! Oh, Aunt Schenck, you must not; those belong to Pierre. He is interested in chemistry, and spends all his odd moments up here working out his experiments."

"I'll teach him better ways of spending his 'odd moments,'" was the grim remark.

Edna felt herself beginning to tremble with the very thought of such a catastrophe, and her sense of justice happily came to her aid, giving to her quiet nature a momentary courage in defence of family rights: "Aunt Schenck, we mean—the boys and I—to pay you all respect as the head of the family now that you have come, but—but—you know that Pantops is our home; it was our father's, and he left it to us—to me. It is our right to have things as we like here."

Edna paused a moment to get breath to finish her speech. It was dreadful to have to assert herself thus, and to her aunt. The cold gray eyes were fixed upon her flushed face, and their gaze wavered not any more than the

eyes of the portraits down stairs' would have done during her daring speech and the lull of silence that succeeded.

"The Look-out Room is our special place for work and study. It is to remain exactly as it is, and no one has the least authority to touch a thing here except ourselves. Forgive me, Aunt Schenck."

It was amusing, the contrast between the independent tone in which this speech was uttered and the meekness of the concluding request. Even Mrs. Schenck perceived this, or would have done so but that she never allowed herself to see anything funny. She rose from her seat without a word to her niece and left the Look-out Room, which, so long as she lived at Pantops, she was never again known to enter except when requested to do so by one of its rightful inmates.

As if to make up for this concession, however, the new ruler of Pantops spared no other nook or corner of the wide house. Unused closets were thrown open to the light, and rooms that had been closed for years except at the annual house-cleaning. The sound of the scrubbing-brush was heard from morning to night, and a continual smell of soap-suds per-

vaded the air. Rex's special stairway, whose offensive odor had occasioned the unlucky outbreak on Edna's part, received its full share of cleansing. Aunt Schenck had yielded all claim to the Look-out Room, but she maintained her authority up to the very door-sill. Rex received orders to do his dirty work out of doors, and was forbidden carrying any article up stairs without first submitting it to his aunt's inspection.

Auntie Blanche kept up for a week, enduring the scrubbing, the fault-finding, the new ways of things with all patience for the sake of "dem blessed chil'en." At the end of that time she was taken down with "a misery," as she called it, but whether the misery was heart-ache or rheumatism it was hard to tell. Mrs. Schenck took excellent care of the old servant, for she was a woman that believed in "doing her duty" in every emergency. She dosed her with medicines and teas; she prescribed absolute quiet, and would not allow Edna to stay in her room but five minutes a day, lest she should excite the invalid. Nobody knew how the old woman tossed and cried and worried her strength away in simple longing for the touch of her young missy's hand on her

aching head and the sound of her pleasant voice.

As for Edna, she wandered about the house wondering at its lack of home-likeness, and not knowing exactly what made it so different from the dear old place it had been. It was clean and orderly beyond past experience. Edna told herself she ought to rejoice over neatness and order. The meals were ready at the stroke of the clock; and good meals they were, too, for Aunt Schenck's experience held larger resources than did Edna's cook-book. Two young girls from the village had been secured in place of Auntie Blanche, and these were found more docile under the new management than she had been. Mrs. Schenck was not displeased at the turn things had taken. When Auntie Blanche got better, and was able to sit up, a new point of discussion arose: What was to be done about her? Mrs. Schenck pronounced her too infirm to be of further use, and recommended that Edna should write and hunt up any relatives she might have, and let them take her and care for her.

A second time Edna Willoughby asserted her rights. Auntie Blanche should never leave Pantops. She was not a servant to be

discharged, but a faithful friend who had loved and cared for her and her brothers when they had no one else to care for them. In her old age she should be a sacred charge to them.

Again Mrs. Schenck heard her niece declare her rights with perfect composure and without resistance, and yielded up Auntie Blanche to her supervision as freely as she had yielded the Look-out Room. Edna then selected a small apartment that had been previously used as a trunk-room—had it cleared and a few simple articles of furniture moved into it. It must be said, to the aunt's credit, that she assisted in the work, and even suggested several matters by which the comfort of the place would be enhanced. Mrs. Schenck was a peculiar person, and far from agreeable in her present position, but she had certain fine qualities, among which were a strong sense of justice and a power of total surrender. A point once yielded was yielded for all time, and without any lingering grudge to spoil the concession.

In this little room Auntie Blanche was duly installed, and near Edna's window in the Look-out Room a well-cushioned rocking-chair, of the clumsy, comfortable style of

a past generation of chairs, was placed where at any hour of the day the old woman might sit and knit, and croon away her beloved camp-meeting tunes accompanied by the drowsy creak of the rockers.

This arrangement did much to restore the home-feeling to Edna and her brothers; it never disturbed the reveries of the authoress, the labors of the chemist, or the dreams of the artist, to have their dear old friend among them there. Rex was delighted to have always a willing ear to listen to his accounts of adventures in the woods, and a pair of eyes that never failed to admire the results of his various labors.

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN.

IT was not until the morning of the second day after the arrival of the strangers at Pantops that the young Willoughbys found themselves alone together. They all chanced to meet in the Look-out Room before breakfast. Laurie was at his table, eager to catch an odd moment for his picture, by this time well under way and giving promise of approaching his ideal; Edna had come to write a note to a former schoolmate; Pierre had promised to make a preparation for the removal of grease-spots for his sister, and had seized these odd minutes for the purpose; Rex was putting a new eye in his owl.

On finding themselves together these various intentions became matters of secondary importance—that is, with the exception of Laurence, in whose eyes painting was second to nothing—and with one accord they gathered about Laurie's table and began to talk.

"Isn't she dreadful?" began Rex. "There's Victor—as good as any of us, he is—not allowed to come up stairs; there's the rabbits, poor things! moved away off from the house, where I can't get at them; there's—"

"Sh-sh-sh, Rex!" exclaimed Edna; "somebody will hear you. I'm real sorry about it all, dear;" and Rex knew that she was by the hug and kiss she gave him as she spoke.

"What do we all think of our cousin John?" asked Pierre.

"He's a good fellow," was Laurie's prompt reply. "I, for one, vote that we give him a place in the Look-out Room."

"Wait till we see if he wants it," said Rex. "I would like him first-rate if he didn't spend so much time brushing his clothes and blacking his boots. He is too finnickty for me."

"He is a good example for you, Rex," said Edna. "Do you ever polish your boots except for Sunday?"

"And his hair," said Laurie, continuing Rex's complaint; "I guess he uses oil to make it lie so smooth; I can't bear to see a boy's hair plastered down like that," said the owner of the bang.

Laurie's censure met with no more sympathy

than did that of Rex. "If that's all there is against him," said Pierre, "he must be a pretty good fellow."

"No doubt, being an only child and his father well off, at least during most of John's lifetime, he is somewhat spoiled, and may be selfish," said Edna, going back to the unfavorable impression given at his first visit to Pantops; "but I must say John is quite a gentleman. It surprises me, too, for I feared he would turn out a vulgar, ignorant fellow, coming as he did from that rough Western place."

"Oh but, Edna, he has not spent his time there for several years; he has been at boarding-school in St. Louis: he told us so when we were in the summer-house after tea; don't you remember?" said Laurie.

"Yes, that must be the reason," Edna replied.

"He talks as if he had always had his own way about things," said Pierre, "yet I can't see anything like spoiling in his mother's treatment of him."

"'Guess it was his father that did the spoiling," remarked Rex.

"We'll invite him up here this evening, and

see how he conducts himself, and whether he is worthy or not to belong to our select society."

While Laurie was speaking one of the new maids knocked at the door and gave Mrs. Schenck's message that the breakfast-bell had rung some time before, and that they would please come down without further delay.

John, who was compelled to admit that it was very dull while the other boys were absent at their regular duties, cheerfully accepted the invitation extended to him by Pierre that evening to come up to their sky-parlor and see how they amused themselves at odd moments.

"'Odd moments!'" he repeated. "I think I could endure the 'odd moments' if I knew what to do with myself all the even ones."

"Yes, indeed," was Laurie's sympathetic rejoinder, "it must be tedious enough lounging about the house here, as you did yesterday, with nobody to speak to."

"Thank you for the compliment, Laurie," said Edna. "Wasn't I here? and couldn't he speak to his mother?"

"Beg pardon, Cousin Edna," said John, laughing, while Rex defended his brother by

remarking that girls were nice enough in their way, and that Edna was a tip-top girl, but for all that a fellow needed other fellows for company.

"We'll introduce him to Reed Remsen," said Pierre, "and after that he'll never know what it is to want a companion."

In the general laugh that followed this speech John did not know whether he was being ridiculed or not. His face flushed instantly, proving that *he* was sufficiently sensitive, if his step-mother was not. He gave a quick glance at the group of faces, and felt assured then and for ever that laughter in that family had no sting behind it—that nothing covert or unkind need be feared from these frank, noble-minded cousins.

On reaching the Look-out Room, John gazed about him in surprise. "It looks like work up here," said he; "I supposed, when you spoke of 'odd moments,' you meant fun."

"So we did," all three of the Willoughby boys responded eagerly.

"Work," added Laurie, "if it is the sort that suits you, is the very best kind of fun."

"You have been at school all the time," said Pierre; "I suppose you have been study-

ing right along. You have never tried any kind of work, have you?"

Pierre was looking while he spoke at John's white hands, that formed a marked contrast to his own, that were well stained with chemicals, and still more so to those of Rex, browned by exposure to weather and scratched in all directions by slips of his knife and the claws of animals.

"Yes, I have tried work, Pierre, though you do look at my hands as if they were not good for anything. A gentleman can work and yet keep his hands decent, I hope."

"Certainly," responded Pierre, at the same time thrusting his own discolored ones into his pockets. "Here," said he, turning toward the east window, "is where I enjoy my 'odd moments.'" They had been standing some time in the Look-out Room, watching the sunset sky from Edna's window.

"Bottles and smells!" said John in a tone of such irreverence toward his treasures that Pierre found it hard to forgive him. "Oh yes, I had enough of chemistry at Granby Hall—two lectures a week, and long recitations besides."

"How I wish I had had your chance!"

said Pierre, a little sadly. "I would give anything to be able to study chemistry under a good teacher."

"Why don't you, then?" John asked with surprise, for in his experience, at least up to the time of his father's death, "to wish for" was synonymous with "to have" in his vocabulary.

The boys united in giving him an account of their father's will, which had made it impossible for any one of them to carry on any branch of study after the age of twelve, except, as Pierre was doing with chemistry, by the aid of books and firm resolution.

"He must have been a queer stick, that father, of yours.—I beg pardon," said John, whose thoughts had turned into speech too rapidly for his customary politeness to cut them short. "I mean, that that was rather a queer arrangement of matters."

"Come over to my studio, Cousin John, before it gets too dark to see my picture."

Laurie was already at his window arranging to the best advantage the pretty landscape that had caused him so much disquietude, yet had been the means of gaining him the new box of paints.

"Ah!" exclaimed John, but with the tone that expresses a polite intention rather than genuine surprise. "Very good, Laurence! It is a copy, I suppose?"

"A copy!" echoed Laurie indignantly. "If you'll get up at five o'clock to-morrow morning and take a walk with me, I'll show you the spot itself. I don't need to copy other pictures when I have all Nature around Questiford to choose from."

"Very true," responded John with obvious indifference. "I took lessons in water-color one term."

"Oh, did you?" exclaimed Laurie with delight. "I am so glad! You must let me see some of your work. Have you a paint-box and things? I shall be so pleased to have somebody to go sketching with!"

Laurie's words poured forth with the rapidity of excitement, but they were checked by the sight of a smile exchanged between Edna and Rex that he felt had reference to him, and then still further checked by John's response:

"I have a paint-box, yes, but I have nothing else to show you. I never painted but one picture, and that mother gave to one of her friends when we broke up to come East.

There was a tree in it and some water—hills in the distance. I worked over it till I got tired, and then Professor Prigg finished it up for the examination. It was a great bore.”

Laurie’s gesture as he threw back his bang expressed his disappointment to those who knew his ways quite as well as words.

“That,” explained Edna, noting the direction of John’s eyes, “is Rex’s museum. Perhaps you will like to look at his birds and butterflies?”

It took her by surprise, however, in spite of her “perhaps,” when John stepped across to Rex’s territory and began examining the case of butterflies. Now came Rex’s turn to feel pleased. He took down his stuffed squirrel, his owl, the case of insects, and his birds, and brought them to the light for inspection.

“Well, now,” said John, as if announcing a remarkable fact, “that’s something I never tried to do.—Rex, whenever you get another bird or anything to stuff, I want you to let me see how you do it.”

“Yes, indeed,” promised Rex, his round eyes sparkling with anticipated pleasure; and he cast a triumphant glance toward Pierre and Laurence that said, “See, now, he belongs to

me; he cares more for the museum than anything else."

From that time John was Reginald's acknowledged *podso*. Among the Questiford school children this word belonged to the regular vocabulary in daily use, but perhaps it was a localism and needs explanation. When any two followed the same pursuits, and were in special sympathy with each other, they were called "podsoes," a simile drawn from the likeness of peas occupying the same pod.

As we have suggested, it had been John Schenck's misfortune to have everything he wanted, as long as his father's money lasted. The result was, that there was no freshness of interest left in him; he had tried and grown tired of many things before he was really advanced enough to appreciate them. Mechanical toys had had their day with him; he had tried a velocipede, next a boat, then a pony. He had learned to play on the flute, but found it "a bore," and gave away his expensive instrument. He had at one period expressed a desire for a printing-press, so of course a printing-press was sent for, and Master John set to work. It amused him at first;

he printed cards for all his friends, and was much praised for his ingenuity. Finally, after battering two or three founts of type and spoiling a quantity of stationery, he became disgusted with printing and sold his press to a schoolmate for a third of its original cost. His last fancy had been to learn the joiner's trade, and during the few months he had spent at home since his father's death he had made himself a voluntary apprentice to the cabinet-maker of the town, and had kept at this long enough to acquire some skill in the use of saw, plane, and chisel. In a short time this, like every other form of industry, had proved "a bore" and been given up.

It is not to be supposed that the energetic Mrs. Schenck had any intention of allowing her husband's "boy" to grow up in idleness, now that she had the control of his movements. She was already in correspondence with a former business-associate of the late Mr. Schenck in regard to obtaining for John a situation in a wholesale mercantile establishment in New York. John submitted to this disposal of his future in his usual easy-going way; he had yet two-thirds of the summer in which to enjoy his leisure.

CHAPTER X.

STOCKING AN AQUARIUM.

ONE Saturday morning, when the first eastern glow was lighting the windows of John's bed-room, there came a tap at the door, accompanied by Rex's shrill whistle, and then the scratching of Victor's paws, with a series of staccato barks. John was not partial to early rising, and this unexpected call was not a bit welcome. He covered his head with the bed-clothes and resolved to make no answer, hoping that Rex would go away supposing him fast asleep. He miscalculated; both dog and master had too much perseverance for that. The din kept up, whistle and call, bark, scratch, and whine, until, in fear that his mother would be wakened and come to see what was the matter, John jumped up and opened the door. There stood Rex, dressed in an outgrown and much-patched suit of clothes, with a fishing-pole having a net at the end, a water-pail, and a

small basket; and there too stood Victor briskly wagging his tail.

"Whew!" exclaimed sleepy John, "what does all this mean?"

"Can't stop to explain now," said Rex briskly, "but I'm starting off for a day's tramp, and thought maybe you'd like to go with me."

John hesitated and yawned: "You're not going off before breakfast, are you?"

"Indeed I am, sir; the best of the morning will be gone by the time breakfast is over. I've been down to the kitchen, though, and found some bread and meat; here's some for you if you'll go."

Rex presented his cousin with the heel of a loaf, on which he had placed a generous slice cut from the roast beef of the previous day's dinner. John took it, with a smile at its dimensions, and said, "You'll have my mother after you if you haggle her bread up that way."

"Will you go or not?" asked Rex, growing impatient.

"Yes; wait two minutes, till I get my clothes on. Sit down, do."

So Rex sat down just inside the door, and

Victor rested on his haunches beside the basket and pail, while John made his toilet.

"Don't put on those boots nor that good suit of clothes," said Rex; "you'll ruin them, for sure. Take the oldest suit you've got. See mine!"

"Haven't any old suit," replied John, to whom this was a new experience.

"Pierre has; I can get them without disturbing anybody, for I know just where. They'll fit you near enough, for you are almost as tall as Pierre;" and before he had finished speaking Rex was off on his voluntary search, from which he presently returned with a much-spotted set of garments which had seen a good deal of service in the laboratory; also a very rough-looking pair of boots.

"I don't know about those," said John, gazing doubtfully at the wardrobe thus collected for him. "Will any one see us?"

"Very likely," was the laughing response; "we have to go right through the village. Ashamed, are you?"

John did feel very much ashamed at the thought of being seen in such a costume, but he would not acknowledge it, and went bravely to work to get ready.

"They fit you finely," remarked Rex, who—mischievous fellow!—sat there hardly able to restrain the chuckle which was shaking his sides at the manifest discomfiture of his cousin. "Hurry, please! There! I wouldn't stop for any more brushing and combing. Your hair is as smooth as an eel's back already."

John did not relish such free remarks, for he was rather touchy, this Western boy, on the subject of his personal appearance; nevertheless, he could bear a good deal from Rex, who was his favorite among the boys. At last he pronounced himself ready, and out they started, John making quite sure first by a peep into the basket that a sufficient lunch was provided.

"I thought," said Master Rex as they marched forth through the pleasant morning freshness, "that you Western folks were the best people in the world at roughing it."

"I am not a specimen of the class of Westerners you mean," replied John with dignity. "There are all sorts of people West, as well as East. For myself, I never could see any virtue in having things uncomfortable when you weren't obliged to."

The two boys with their accoutrements, and

Victor following, could hardly fail to attract some attention as they passed through the village, particularly as Victor was inclined to exchange salutations with every dog on the way. A few early-rising housekeepers were stirring, and in one yard a man was out chopping wood. Rex noticed with amusement that his companion pulled his hat down over his face in passing these.

As they passed Robby Remsen's house Rex paused and gave a loud whistle. This was echoed from within, and with hardly a moment's delay the door opened and out shuffled the long-legged Reed.

"'Mornin'," said he, accosting John, at the same time giving him a glance of investigation. The two boys had met before, but not in a way to get much acquainted, for the "Willoughby shadow" had almost ceased his visits to Pantops of late, through a bashful dread of meeting the new-comers. It was as well for him that he had, for Mrs. Schenck, had she caught him passing through the house in his usual way, would have turned him out with as little hesitation as she did Victor.

"What's up?" was Reed's concise question as the three marched along the road together.

"Aquarium," was Rex's equally concise response.

"Hm-m-m!" mused Reed. "Never heard o' sech a critter; lives in the woods, does it?"

This question at once dissipated the feeling of strangeness among the trio of boys. John shouted with laughter, Rex chuckled, and Reed, accepting the joke, even though at his own expense, gave a wondering smile.

As soon as the little naturalist could control his muscles he enlightened Reed as to the object of the day's expedition: "An aquarium isn't an animal; it is just a thing with water in it, and you put plants and fishes and shells in it, and keep it to study."

"Study?" echoed John. "I thought an aquarium was only something pretty to look at."

"It is pretty—real pretty, if it's made right—but then it's something better," said Rex. "Now, I want to find out how the little creatures live that are in the water; I want to learn what they eat and how they behave themselves."

"You know enough about 'em already," remarked Reed.—"Never saw any boy take so to livin' critters," he added, turning with a

bashful attempt at conversation toward John. "Things in the water and things on land, it's all the same to him. I b'lieve Rex'd like to be a fish or a bird himself."

"Indeed I wouldn't," rejoined Rex. "If I were an animal myself, how could I find out the habits of the others? No, I just want to be a boy, with nothing to do but loaf around in the woods. I'd like to be a sort of Robinson Crusoe, and have Reed for my man Friday. A desert island full of specimens all to ourselves, that would be jolly, eh, Reed?"

But Reed had never read *Robinson Crusoe*, and wisely refused to commit himself.

By this time the rapid walk of the boys had brought them out of sight and sound of any but the feathered and four-footed inhabitants of the wood, and presently they reached the side of a shady little pond.

"Here's my place," exclaimed Rex, pointing to a large stone projecting into the water.

"Minnies enough there, if you want 'em," said Reed.

Rex made no answer; he was busy counting over the various pieces of property required for the day's needs. Victor deposited the tin pail at his master's feet; Reed surrendered the fish-

ing-pole, his share of the burden; and John handed over the lunch-basket.

"A pretty place," remarked the young Westerner as he looked around, meanwhile dusting himself off with his handkerchief.

"I'm glad you think so," said Rex. "You've seen a great many places in your travels, no doubt, John, but I am not willing to believe any of them can beat Questiford."

"Questiford? What an odd name for a town!" said John, who deemed it not politic to make a direct answer. "Why did they call it that?"

"I have heard that the first settlers here had been wandering about for a good while looking for a suitable place for a village, and that their great difficulty was in finding sufficient water; when they reached this neighborhood their 'quest' was at an end, so they concluded to build here, and named the place Questiford."

"Well done!" said John; "that's quite a history for a small village. Your forefathers showed their good taste, anyway."

Rex's attention was now bestowed on the day's business. Having given his fishing-net into Reed's care with minute instructions, he

announced to John that he was going to walk on a little farther to get some snails.

"Bah!" said that young gentleman, making a wry face. "I think I prefer staying here with Reed. Where do you find your snails?"

"Beside stones generally, near the water; they are very retiring little creatures."

"Nasty things, ugh! How do you get them when you find them?"

"Get them? Why, what do you mean? I have only to pick them up. Snails are not very swift at running away, you know."

"Pick them up? With your fingers?"

"Of course; how else?" said Rex, much amused at his companion's expression of disgust. "They are pretty little things."

"I guess I wasn't meant to be a naturalist," remarked John with slow seriousness. He followed Rex for a few steps, notwithstanding his manifest repugnance for the objects of his search, and watched him move one or two stones, and finally pick up a couple of the "nasty things" and place them with great care in the tin pail.

"So, that's what you brought the pail for? I hope my mother will have it well scoured before she has it used again in the kitchen," said John.

Rex did not answer aloud, but to himself he said that of all the fellows he had ever met, his cousin John was the one he should most enjoy playing off a practical joke upon. It would be such fun to see him frightened out of his wits by secreting a toad in his pocket or an assortment of bugs in his bureau-drawer. But Rex's fun was always held in restraint by his kindness of heart, and he would not hurt anything intentionally, from an insect up to the feelings of his cousin John.

"Are the snails to go in your aquarium?" asked the latter.

Rex nodded.

"What for? Surely you don't put them in for beauty?"

"Not exactly, although I do like to watch them very much. Snails help to keep the water clear; that is a very necessary thing in an aquarium."

"Well, I've learned something," said John good-naturedly. "I am glad there's something good even in snails. Now tell me what sort of thing have you for your aquarium? I begin to be interested."

Rex believed that he really was, for, instead of rejoining Reed and Victor at the quiet

task of fishing for minnows and guarding the lunch-basket, he was still keeping up with him, pausing whenever he did to look at plant or insect or stone on the way.

"Oh, I'm doing things on a very small scale, John," said he; "I've only got a glass jar for my water-garden. It's a big one, though—the biggest I ever saw. I hope we can get things enough to make it look pretty."

"What else do you want besides snails and minnows?" asked John.

"A few little stones, some sand and dirt, and, if I can find them, I want two or three tadpoles."

"Why don't you get some gold-fishes, Rex? They are the proper thing for an aquarium."

"Yes, but, you see, I can't afford to buy gold-fishes; I must be satisfied with what can be caught in the waters of Questiford."

"Well, but gold-fishes must be caught somewhere. I never thought about it till this minute," said John; "where do they get them?"

"From China; that is, they are very common in China, and were brought from there

in the first place, but now they are common enough in this country."

Presently Rex announced that he had captured snails enough for his purpose, and the two boys turned back to rejoin Reed. They found him stretched at full length on the grass, fast asleep, while Victor, wide awake and eager for excitement, gave a series of short barks to indicate his pleasure at the return of his master. Reed had caught several "minnies," as the boys called them. The day's work was progressing very favorably for the young naturalist.

Reed roused up at the sound of the dog's bark, and looked a little sheepish at having been caught napping so early in the day. "Had sech a toothache all night!" said he, by way of apology—"didn't sleep a wink hardly."

"You ought not to have come out, then, to-day," said John; "you may take cold in the tooth sitting here by the water."

"Oh, that's nuthin'—do it every day; besides, I knew Rex couldn't get on without me.—Could ye now, Rex?"

Rex's response to this pointed question was slow in coming, and ere the contest between

kindness and truth had come to an end in his mind a new subject of interest came up and made any answer unnecessary.

"Sticklebacks!" exclaimed Reed. "I seen a splendid fellow just then, with his spines all out ready for a fight. He'd look fine in your 'quarium, eh, Rex?"

Both boys drew closer to the water's edge, and, following the direction of Reed's eyes, saw a tiny fish of brilliant red-and-gold coloring, but with dangerous-looking spines sticking out from its body.

"Reg'lar hedgehog, he is!" said Reed. "He's been havin' a fight, you see."

"How do you know that?" asked John.

The blacksmith's son cast an eager glance at his friend's guest, as if to make sure that the question was an honest one and that there was no chaffing intended; then, with evident pride at knowing something of which so fine a young gentleman was ignorant, he explained that the male stickleback was a fighting character; that if any other fish came within reach while he was guarding his nest with his young family in it, there was sure to be a mortal combat; and that after the battle the conquering stickleback appeared in bright-

er colors than before, but if worsted in the affray he retreated in the water in a quiet suit of gray.

"Who told you all that?" asked John, still doubting the ability of a rough, untaught fellow like this to give him any information.

Reed grinned with pleasure: "Don't need nobody to tell *me*; I watch the critters, and see for myself how they act. Knowed all about sticklebacks and sech ever since I was so high;" and he held his hand out above the ground a short distance to indicate a very small child.

"Well," continued he, addressing Rex, "shall I catch one for you?"

Rex looked doubtful. "They do put sticklebacks in aquaria," said he, "but it must be in larger ones than mine; they need more room than they would have in my jar. I guess we'd better be content with minnies and snails and— By the way, I wonder where we can find any tadpoles?"

"I know," exclaimed Reed, rising quickly from the grass, on which he had again flung himself. "There's a great puddleful of 'em up the road a piece; come along and I'll show you."

Rex made a movement to follow Reed, but John only said, "Hm-m-m!" and drew out his watch.

"I think it's pretty near time for lunch," said he; "tadpoles may be enough for you two, but I'd prefer something to eat."

The other boys good-humoredly gave in to John's reasonable suggestion, and agreed to postpone the search for tadpoles until they had emptied the lunch-basket. The two Questiford lads were quite satisfied with the simple lunch which Rex had hastily procured from the Pantops larder, but to John the loss of a regular dinner was an event that cast a gloom over his feelings.

"It's all very well," said he, "to take a moderate walk in the morning, and get back in time to brush up for dinner, but wasting the best part of a day hunting up slimy little things is not to my taste."

"That is because you're not used to it," said Rex kindly. "When you have been in the country a short time you'll get up an interest in such things—maybe." It must be owned that "maybe" was the most emphatic word in the sentence.

"I'll tell you what," said John: "you two

look for your tadpoles, and I'll gather some pretty stones for the aquarium."

"That's a good fellow!" was Rex's hearty response. "I want a lot of stones, and I want some of the little plants you see growing under the water all along here; if you would get a few, that would help finely."

Rex and Reed started off, and Victor followed. It proved a greater distance to the tadpole-puddle than Reed had supposed, and more than an hour elapsed ere they returned with their lively little prizes. When at last they drew near the spot where they had left John, they hallooed and whistled to him to announce their approach, but no answer was given.

"He has wandered off somewhere looking for things," suggested Rex.

"More like he's got tired and gone home," said Reed.

Neither of these suppositions proved the correct one. As they came up to the open space where they had sat to eat their luncheon, a sound of splashing and flopping attracted their attention to the stream where it flowed past the large flat stone where the party had at first halted.

"John has gone fishing in good earnest," said Rex.

"Help! help! hurry!" roared John, spitting out water between the words.

Fortunately, the stream was not very deep, and there was no danger. Either of the other boys would have made light of the situation and scrambled to dry land without more ado, but poor John was quite unused to that sort of adventure. His head as it came out of the water looked shinier and sleeker than ever, and the condition of his collar and cuffs was pitiable. The others could not help laughing, and John, to whom the affair was no joke at all, began to get angry. The laugh, however, lasted but a moment, and before John was ready to splutter forth his indignation Reed had off his shoes—he wore no stockings—had rolled up his pants, and was wading in to the rescue of his unlucky companion. A moment more, and the victim of scientific research stood dripping and sad on dry ground. The account he gave of himself was that he had caught sight of a tangle of pretty weed some distance out in the water, and that, stretching himself at full length on the flat stone, he had attempted to reach it;

but the weed was farther off than he had thought it, and the stone proved slippery, so that the sad result had been naturally brought about.

John's lips were white and he was shaking with the chill caused by his unexpected plunge. The other boys did the best for him they could: Rex squeezed the water from his hair, and dried it as well as possible with his handkerchief; Reed took off his own jacket and put it around him, and urged Rex to assist him in getting home speedily, promising to follow on with the things himself. Victor, who understood the state of things as well as anybody, ran on ahead, barking all the way back to Pantops, and succeeded in bringing Mrs. Schenck and Edna out as far as the elms to see what was the matter. If John had felt sensitive about being looked at when he passed through Questiford Village that morning, much more so did he feel on returning in so sad a plight. Pierre's dirty old suit had been bad enough, said this particular young gentleman to himself, but Pierre's old suit drenched and torn, with Reed Remsen's miserable jacket as a supplement, was a good deal worse. The women met the returning excursionists

with characteristic greeting. Edna, full of sympathy, hastened to throw her own light shawl over the still dripping garments, saying, "Oh, Cousin John, I am so sorry! Get up stairs as quick as you can, and Rex shall build you a fire and help you change your clothes, and I'll go at once to the kitchen and make you a cup of hot tea."

John's mother received him with the grim remark, "John Schenck, I do believe you are getting a bigger dunce than ever. Didn't know any better than to tumble in the water, eh?"

CHAPTER XI.

SCROLL-SAWING.

EDNA WILLOUGHBY had long been promising herself the great treat of a visit to a former schoolmate whose home was in an attractive region on the coast of Maine. The right time for this visit had never seemed to present itself. Hitherto, with the cares of a household upon her, she had taken comfort in the thought that the boys could never by any possibility get along without her. Now the all-sufficient presence of Aunt Schenck freed her from household responsibilities, and good old Auntie Blanche had got well again, and was quite competent to darn socks for the boys, and be company for them too during their odd moments in the Look-out Room. Edna wrote to her friend, therefore, that she intended to spend the month of July with her, and began to make her preparations accordingly. To John, who still entered the Look-

out Room only as a visitor, she offered to loan her side, giving him generous permission to move away her desk and put in its place whatever he liked.

"But I don't like anything much," had been his listless reply, "and everything is such a bother."

"You might bring up your books here and study," was Pierre's suggestion one day before Edna's departure.

"Bah!" said John. "I had enough of that at school to last me a lifetime."

Pierre sighed and said to himself, "Ah, if I had only had such a chance!"

"Get a fiddle or a flute, then," advised Laurie, "and try your hand at music."

"I had a flute once," said John; "it was a great bore. The fact is," complained this unfortunate boy, "I can't bear this continual work! work! work! I never saw such boys as you are. Now, when other fellows get a little time to themselves they go in for having some fun, but you—you plod along like middle-aged men."

"Well, John," said Pierre with a smile, "we like fun too just as well as anybody. Tell us what kind of fun you want."

"Hm-m-m," said John dubiously; "there's baseball, and there's croquet—everybody plays croquet—there's boating. Now, why don't you boys have a boat?—you've got a real good place for it, I'm sure."

"The stream?" said Rex mischievously. "Oh, that's better suited to go bathing in, you see."

"I suppose the real fact with us is, that we each have something we like much better than croquet or boating to fill up our odd moments," said Pierre; "but there's no reason, John, why you should not have a boat if you wish, or a croquet set either. We might all go shares and send for one."

"No, no," said John hastily; "I don't care a pin for either of them. There's no fun unless you all had time to enjoy them too."

"We would take time," said Laurie with an effort at unselfishness.—"Wouldn't we, boys?"

"Yes, certainly," said the others.

John, however, had too little interest in either boating or croquet to accept what he so well knew would be a hard sacrifice for his cousins. The odd moments in the Look-out Room were the bits of real pleasure sandwiched between the hours of their prosaic lives.

"I'll tell you what, boys," said he with sudden brightening: "I'll have a scroll-saw."

This announcement was received with surprise.

"Why, John," said Laurie, "I thought you had tried everything that a boy could do? How is it you've never had a scroll-saw?"

"I have told you—haven't I?—about my working at the cabinet-maker's shop? I got quite handy with tools there, and I suppose that satisfied me at the time other boys were getting the mania for fret-carving."

"What has put it in your head now to get one?" asked Rex.

"I saw an advertisement in the paper I got yesterday of a new kind that I believe I should like better than any others I have seen. I notice you have not many fancy things for such a big house as this is, and I thought it would be nice while Edna is away to make a pair of brackets or something like that to give her. It will amuse me."

"You're real kind to think about doing that for Edna," said Laurie, who always warmed toward the person who showed kind feeling to his sister.

"I'm glad I thought of the saw," remarked

John. "It will help pass away some of my 'odd moments.' I'll send off an order to-morrow, and have it here by the last of the week."

It was agreed that Edna should not be told of John's scheme of industry, so that the brackets might be a surprise to her when she should come home. She therefore started on her journey in entire ignorance of the scroll-saw, which arrived the day after her departure, and was forthwith established, in place of her dear old desk, at the west window of the Look-out Room. Every member of the family rejoiced over this new acquisition. Even Mrs. Schenck, to whom John's idle habits and continual question, "What shall I do with myself?" were a source of great annoyance, welcomed the appearance of an article which suggested work. John was all impatience to begin sawing, and chafed at the delay necessary for obtaining wood of the proper thickness; this could not be found in Questiford, where no work in wood was done more delicate than making a kitchen-table, and so had to be ordered from the nearest town. In the mean time John busied himself in preparing patterns. One sheet of these came with the saw, but nothing it contained was the exact style that John wanted.

His imagination pictured as the gift that was to surprise his cousin Edna a pair of brackets of unsurpassed delicacy of workmanship; he "wouldn't have any of these common things, such as everybody makes," he said. For a couple of days, therefore, whenever the young Willoughbys came home from work or school, John was sure to be found with pencil and paper bending over Laurie's table inventing patterns. Polite Laurie had not a word to say against this, and, like the others, was well pleased that anything should be found to amuse John; but, for all that, it was a sore trial to him to find his choice pencils rapidly diminishing in length, and his carefully-arranged drawer thrown in unprecedented disorder by John's repeated searches for paper, rubber, and other things.

"What do you think of this design?" asked John, holding out a paper for Pierre's inspection as the latter entered the Look-out Room, hot and hurried, at noon, to note the condition of certain chemicals with which he wanted to experiment.

He stepped at once to the table and took the paper from John's hands.

"I have been working away at this pretty

near all the morning," said John, "but I believe I have hit it at last."

"Very good, indeed!" was Pierre's encouraging comment—"a very neat pattern, and does you credit, John."

"Can you suggest any alteration? You see, I want to have it all perfect, so that if the wood should come this afternoon I can cut it out."

Pierre on this made a more critical examination of the design. "If there is anything," said he slowly, "to be called in question, it is the position of the cat on that large branch; wouldn't it be more natural for the cat to be at the base? But perhaps you can't alter that without spoiling the whole thing. I don't know that it makes any particular difference."

John hastily took the paper from Pierre's hand. "Cat!" said he; and the tone showed Pierre that he had made some unhappy blunder. "It is not a cat; it is an owl. The owl is Minerva's bird, suggestive of authorship and all that, and so appropriate for Edna. So it looks like a cat, does it? Well, I may as well give up and do just the common things everybody does."

Pierre would have given his day's earnings for power to recall his unfortunate words, but there was no help now. He was glad that at the moment Laurie appeared at the door to summon them down to dinner. "Here's Laurie," said he to John; "show him the design. He has a much better eye for such things than I have."

Laurie stepped briskly toward the table, interested as soon as he caught the word "design."

"See what a good bracket-pattern John has made," said Pierre. "It's an owl on a branch," added he, in great fear lest his brother should repeat his own mistake.

"Owl! A cat, you mean," was Laurie's innocent comment. "Good for you, John! That will make a very pretty thing when it is cut."

Laurie wondered at the silence which followed these words of approval. He looked from Pierre to John, and again back at Pierre, and then all three boys burst out laughing. It was the best thing they could do.

"My poor owl!" exclaimed John, but without any ill-humor in his tone. "I have worked so hard over it, and have been trying

to make it as much like Rex's stuffed one up there as possible."

"'Tisn't bad," said Laurie consolingly; "and when it is cut in wood nobody would know but that it was an owl—maybe," added he, being forced by his truthfulness to add the qualifying word. "But," he added, touched by John's discouraged air, "I can alter this very easily; that is, if you'll trust your design to my hands. I have not had much practice at drawing birds, but, with Rex's owl up there to look at, I think I can make it all right."

Laurie held out his hand, and John yielded up to him the paper, which he had begun to crush when Laurie, echoing Pierre's criticism, pronounced his owl a cat.

The wood arrived in due time, and the pieces for Edna's brackets were selected, white and dark, for the work was to be inlaid; and pretty soon the sawing began. The noise of it set Victor barking and Mrs. Schenck scolding, and Auntie Blanche was forced to desert her usual seat in the Look-out Room and retire to her own apartment, sighing for the quietness of the times when the scratching of Miss Edna's pen had been the only sound to disturb her meditations.

John went at the sawing—as he did at every other new pursuit in its turn—with a perfect fury of enthusiasm. Broken saws and spoiled pieces of wood marked his progress. He was out of patience with himself for finding any difficulty with so simple a machine. Had he not learned to use tools and to do much more difficult work? He forgot that he was somewhat out of practice, and also that the scroll-saw needed different management from the stronger tools to which he had been accustomed. Laurie had improved the owl, so that it could no longer be mistaken for a cat. The backs of the brackets were cut out and neatly fitted together. John rejoiced in his success, and declared that he meant to keep to the scroll-saw; it was decidedly the most interesting thing he had ever tried. Alas! a difficulty arose. He had not been accurate in his measurements, and when the shelf part of the brackets was cut and adjusted to the back, it was found to be too short by half an inch. In vain did the Willoughby boys strive to encourage their cousin to cut a new pair of shelves, representing to him that, as all the difficult parts were finished, it would be a great pity to let the brackets fail of comple-

tion because of this mistake; but John was stubborn and hopeless. He refused to "worry with the old thing any longer."

Laurie quietly resolved that Edna should not lose the promised gift because of John's lack of application. Much to the surprise of the rest of the household, he seated himself at the innocent but much-abused saw and tried his skill on a bit of wood.

"You never can do it," said John, who felt not altogether pleased that his cousin should attempt to succeed in that at which he had made a failure. "It will take a week of 'odd moments' to get the right motion of the foot, and then you'll break no end of saw-blades."

"You sent for a gross, didn't you?" asked Laurie.

"Yes."

"How many have you left?"

"Fully six dozen, perhaps more."

"I'll buy them from you if you are willing," said Laurie.

"Oh take them for nothing if you are so in earnest about the thing," said John, rather crossly. "You'll find them in your table-drawer."

"Thank you, John. Are you really will-

ing that I should use the saw until I finish these brackets?"

"Use it all the time, for what I care," said John; "I shall never bother with it again."

Pierre, who, busy among his chemicals on the opposite side of the room, had heard this brief conversation, did not approve of his brother's taking John's one occupation so completely out of his hands, but thought it best not to interfere in the matter. It turned out that while Laurie, at odd moments, morning, noon, and night, was patiently learning the motion of the foot and the manner of turning the wood in the saw-frame, an order was on its way from Pantops for a new supply of saws and an assortment of patterns.

When these arrived by express the week following, addressed to "Master John Schenck," that young gentleman was having a fit of the blues, and his mother was suffering constant annoyance from the old question, "What shall I do with myself?"

The brackets, being neatly finished, much to John's mortification, were pronounced by the family in council to be the very things to place in Edna's room on either side of the bureau, and to afford a resting-place for two

Parian dogs that had been standing helplessly around ever since she got them, having no definite position anywhere. Laurie put up the brackets and attached a slip of paper to the one nearest the door on which was written, "Edna Willoughby, from her cousin John Schenck." The family were called in to pass judgment on the position of the new ornaments. John at once noticed the paper, and went up to examine it; then without a word he removed it from its place, unobserved by Laurie. As soon as the other boys were out of the house he placed another paper on the bracket, announcing it as "A gift from her affectionate brother Laurence." The next day this paper was in its turn removed, and the original name replaced. Pierre, who discovered the friendly contest between the boys, settled it by writing on another paper and fastening it to the bracket, "Edna, from her cousin John and brother Laurence—a mutual gift."

A few warm, weary days, destitute of any employment save reading a few old magazines and strolling occasionally through the village, were sufficient to make John very much pleased at the arrival of the package by express.

The patterns were pronounced "tip-top," and a fresh impulse was given toward the rejected occupation. He went to work at once at a paper-knife, which was accomplished without any drawback saving the breakage of a number of saws, and was most satisfactory in the result. He wondered again and again who could have sent him the patterns, but Pierre kept his own counsel, and felt abundantly repaid by witnessing the success of his plan. In a short time—for when John once got interested in any work he kept at it faithfully—a number of pretty articles were finished. A pen-holder was in readiness to grace Edna's desk when it should again be established in its place; a spool-box was presented to Mrs. Schenck; and a wall-pocket adorned the family sitting-room for the convenience of all. Besides these completed articles, the floor of the newly-established work-shop was strewn with fragments of wood that had by some inopportune crack or incorrect sawing fallen short of the perfection which John exacted of himself in all his work. In spite of the noise and dirt occasioned by the scroll-saw, its presence at Pantops was felt by all the household to be a real blessing.

CHAPTER XII.

PROFESSOR COLEMAN.

IT was a parched afternoon in August. Pantops looked hot and deserted. There was no stir among the branches of the great elms to indicate that they possessed any more life than the walls of the house. On the warm grass in the back yard lay Victor panting, trying to obtain shelter from the sun by means of the clothes hung on the lines to dry, for it happened to be washing-day. In the old summer-house, so overgrown with vines that now it seemed but one immense trellis for their support, lay John, extended at full length on its wide settee. His broad-brimmed hat was flung on the ground; his jacket, collar, and cravat were suspended on the little branches that here and there had forced their way in through the lattice-work. A magazine and a palm-leaf fan, fallen to the ground beside him, showed that sleep

had overtaken him unawares while trying his best to keep mind and body comfortable.

All these details were taken in at a glance by a gentleman who stood with a large umbrella in one hand and a small bag in the other, gazing with a pleased smile in through the summer-house door.

"Which of the boys can this be?" said he to himself. "Not a Willoughby feature in that face—not like the mother, either."

Nobody could stand long in that precise spot with the sun beating on his back to soliloquize over any subject, however interesting, and the traveller, after setting down his bag long enough to make a little use of John's fan, turned and walked slowly toward the front entrance. The house appeared to be taking a nap as well as the boy; its green blinds were tightly shut like the eyelids of a torpid monster; the utter silence appeared inhospitable to the weary man, who had got out of the stage at the other end of the village and walked up the long ascent of Questiford's one street. Mrs. Schenck, who chanced to be on her regular afternoon dusting-tour through the house, luckily opened the door to drive out a refractory bluebottle fly.

The thrifty housekeeper, intent only on her fly, was not a little startled at sight of a strange man just stepping on the portico. Her instant thought was of retreat, for her crimps were not in company order and her calico wrapper was a sadly patched and faded affair; she had put it on because it was cooler this sultry day than any other dress in her wardrobe. One keen glance at the small bag the stranger held changed this impulse into one of indignation.

"We never encourage agents," she said, and was about to close the door in the man's face, but he defeated her purpose by suddenly putting his foot on the sill.

"One moment, madam, please;" and he fumbled in his vest-pocket for a card.

"You need not get out any samples," said Mrs. Schenck. "What I want I buy at the stores; I don't encourage such idle, loafing business as selling things from door to door."

He held out a card to her with a smile which she considered impudent, and therefore would not suffer her eyes to rest upon it.

"Eliza Willoughby! I can't be mistaken!" exclaimed the stranger with a sudden certainty of recognition.

Mrs. Schenck dropped her duster in utter amazement and put up her hand to her crimps, as the idea that this was not an agent, after all, but an acquaintance of the family, dawned upon her mind. She scrutinized the face before her with the same keenness which she used in inspecting her groceries before purchasing. The gentleman stood with polite endurance still on the step, waiting for the lady's memory to do its work, until, compelled by heat and fatigue, he brought the uncomfortable pause to a close by pronouncing the name she had refused to read on the card: "Anthony Coleman."

"Anthony Coleman?" repeated the lady with emphasis. Well, I am fairly beat! I should as soon have thought of seeing— Well now, do tell where you came from, and all about it. It must be every day of twenty years since your last visit to Pantops."

Mrs. Schenck led the way, as she spoke, to the parlor, and strove to atone for her rudeness to the supposed peddler by all possible attention to the discovered friend.

"The last time you were here was when poor Henry was alive," she said with a sigh.

"A great deal must have happened to you

as well as to myself in that time ; I have come fifty miles out of my way to see the old place and the old friends."

"And, after all, came near being sent away as a peddler!" said Mrs. Schenck, both amused and vexed at her blunder. "Now, if you'll excuse me, Anthony, I will go and see to having a room put in order for you."

"Very good!" replied the guest. "I came with the intention of spending a week at old Pantops, provided I received an invitation."

During his mother's absence from the parlor John came sauntering into the room, looking more comfortable than elegant in his shirt-sleeves and with his collar and cravat in hand. He went whistling across to the piano, and attempted to strike the keynote of his tune. The room was so dark that he had not observed the presence of Professor Coleman, who was sitting on the sofa.

"Good-afternoon, young man," said the professor, and came forward with outstretched hand. "I suppose you are Pierre Willoughby? Do you know, Mr. Pierre, I had a fine opportunity of becoming acquainted with your features a short time since in the summer-house? Do you feel refreshed by your nap?"

John was as much astonished at this sudden apparition as his mother had been, and had no means, even by use of his memory, of learning who the stranger was; he hastened, however, to correct the impression that he was Pierre by announcing that he was John Schenck, Pierre's cousin.

"John Schenck?" repeated the gentleman, holding the boy at arm's length and scrutinizing his face with a pair of eyes sunk far under the shadow of heavy brows. "I knew the family tree of the Willoughbys, root and branch, when I was a youngster, but I do not recollect the name of Schenck occurring therein."

John explained the matter to the satisfaction of the professor, who still seemed to find it amusing that Eliza Willoughby should ever have married, or rather, as it seemed to John, that somebody should have married her. By the time Mrs. Schenck returned—this time with her best black dress and revived crimps—to announce that Professor Coleman's room was ready, John and he had become pleasantly acquainted, and it was with great satisfaction that the former heard that the visit of his new friend was to extend over a week. "There'll

be something to amuse a fellow," he remarked to himself as he went to his room to don a fresh suit and put an extra polish on both hair and boots.

The Willoughby boys greeted with delight this old friend of their father's youth. The name of Anthony Coleman was not altogether unknown to them, for it occurred several times in the "Family Record" in connection with amusing pranks of their father's boyhood, and once there was an account in their mother's writing of a pleasant visit from her husband's friend, Anthony Coleman, and of his gift to her little girl of a pretty gold chain and locket. This last visit had been previous to Pierre's birth, so that Edna was the only one of the family to whom a personal recollection would be possible; and she, unfortunately, was still absent.

During the long interval the professor had himself married, gone abroad, lost his wife, returned to America, and settled down as professor of chemistry in one of the aspiring young colleges of the West. During the summer vacation he had been invited to deliver a course of lectures in a large town within possible reach of Questiford, and his heart

had so burned for a glimpse at the spot familiar to his early manhood that he had resolved to devote a little time and trouble to the renewal of those early associations.

He singled out Laurie as bearing the closest resemblance to his father, and would have him sit beside him at table, distinguishing him from the rest by the affectionate title "My son."

After the first formality had worn away—and that could not take long with the genial professor—the boys found themselves drawn into giving him an account of their life past and present, their work, their pleasures, their likes and dislikes, their wishes and purposes. This came about, too, without direct question and answer. This lonely, middle-aged professor was a wise man in his way; he knew how to draw out the hearts of young people as well as to put knowledge into their heads. The gray eyes that seemed hidden too far under the heavy, ungainly brows to observe what was going on about him proved themselves capable of taking note of the most minute details. The evening after his arrival, as they all sat out on the broad piazza, as was the family custom in summer, the professor amused them by telling each his fortune, or rather his

character. Mrs. Schenck, not giving her guest credit for as much insight into human nature as he possessed, told him to see how near he could hit the truth in drawing her portrait. His eyes twinkled as he slowly and with careful words brought out the truth too exactly to allow his criticism to be very complimentary. It was well the evening shadows concealed the expression of the boys' faces during this description, for Aunt Schenck would have been doubly disturbed had she seen the endorsement of it all shining in four pairs of eyes.

"It's all a piece of foolish guess-work, Anthony Coleman," she said; "so of course I don't take any offence, although I do say it is hardly the thing to let your imagination loose in the ears of these children."

"Please tell us what sort of fellow Pierre is," called out Rex, who, seated on a step at his new friend's feet, with Victor beside him, was greatly pleased with the fortune-telling. Pierre stood leaning against a pillar sharpening a pencil by the light of the moon.

"Yes, sir," said he, "it may be a help toward improvement to hear the impression I have made upon a stranger."

"Pierre Willoughby," said the professor

thoughtfully, "is a boy who thinks the world is principally an immense laboratory wherein all manner of chemical combinations are going on, and that the highest earthly ambition of mortal man is to study out the hidden secrets of Nature's mixtures. He accepts his daily duty as a necessary drudgery, but spends every leisure thought upon the means of furthering his knowledge of science. He is guilty of a concealed murmur at Providence for withholding from him the opportunities he longs for, but he resolutely keeps his desires shut up in his own breast, so that by no hint may he disturb the happiness of his family. He has temptations to selfishness—that is, to pre-occupation, which is a form of selfishness—but he fights against these, and follows up in his daily living the ideal he has set before himself of the mingled fatherhood and brotherhood that befits the oldest boy in a family of orphan children."

When the professor paused there was a moment of silence, for all felt how true and well deserved had been the commendation given to Pierre. Victor's was the voice to break the spell, barking with all his might—not, it must be owned, through sympathy with the speak-

er's words, but because urged thereto by certain liberties that Rex was taking with his tail—a freedom which in his moments of meditation Victor found it hard to tolerate even from the hands of his beloved master.

“It's true, every word of it!” exclaimed Laurie, with warm approval in his voice. “Our Pierre is the best kind of a brother; it won't hurt him if he does hear himself praised,” he continued in answer to a warning tap on the shoulder from John. This precaution, however, proved wholly unnecessary, for Pierre, as soon as he caught the professor's last word, had swung himself down upon the garden-path from the pillar of the piazza against which he had leaned, and so passed out of sight.

“Tell us, please,” said Rex, “what you think of Cousin John.”

The professor looked gravely into the face of John Schenck, and presently said: “With proper training he will make a very good sort of man. At present he seems more fit to be a dapper clerk in a dry-goods store than aught else; but he has possibilities for a nobler position, if only he will choose a work and stick to it. He is one of the sort who often

make shipwreck of life for want of the adhesive property. Now, it don't make so very much matter *what* a man sets himself to do in this world, so long as he chooses a useful and honest branch of industry. The great need is thoroughness and perseverance. One man may chop wood, and another judge between the innocent and the guilty in a court of law; if the former does his work honestly, and the latter does not, in God's sight the woodchopper is the nobler man."

"My son has more talent than you give him credit for, Anthony Coleman," said Mrs. Schenck, with some indignation in her tone. "His father was a smart man, and made money. He gave John much greater advantages than poor Henry has provided for his boys, and I expect him to turn out something worth while."

Nobody responded, and Mrs. Schenck went on: "I have made arrangements for John to enter into business with a first-rate firm in New York. He is to go on the fifteenth of next month. I expect him to work his way up, and make a fortune while others of his age are spending their time dreaming of what they would like to do."

"You are a sensible woman, Eliza," said Professor Coleman; "and I see but one thing in the way of John's fulfilling your expectations."

"I know, I know," interposed the mother, as if averse to the mention by another than herself of her son's great fault. "John is as fickle-minded as a weathercock; he gets tired of everything he undertakes before it is half done. But he'll get over that; he's only a boy yet, Anthony."

The game of fortune-telling was fast turning from an amusement to a serious occupation, and this suited neither the professor nor the boys; so he gayly turned the current of thought by proposing a stroll through the garden to get cooled off and to find Pierre. It was an acceptable suggestion, especially to Rex, who had for some moments been longing to be off in pursuit of the lightning-bugs which filled the air. Mrs. Schenck remained seated on the piazza, being somewhat perturbed in mind by her guest's too clear insight into John's failings; moreover, she had no mind to risk being bitten by the mosquitos for the sake of a stroll through the garden.

The next day each boy was eager to be the first to show the professor the way to the Look-out Room. Pierre was especially anxious, for he had been working all his odd moments for two days previous over an experiment that repeatedly failed—from what cause he could not understand. He was sure that this friend, learned in the science at whose outer door he was beginning to knock, could at once set things right for him. Bright and early he was up and listening for the opening of the professor's door. All was silence in that direction. Pierre groaned as the moments flew by and the breakfast-hour approached, for he had always to hasten from the meal to his day's work; then he knew well that at noon he would have to share his chances for their guest's attention with every other member of the family. He stood at his own door meditating the propriety of making an inroad upon the professor under pretence of asking if he needed anything, when he spied Rex creeping up the stairs with a pitcher of hot water in hand.

"What are you about, Rex?" asked the elder brother.

"Our professor will want to shave, you

know," explained the other in a low tone, "and I am going to get his boots and black them."

"Very well," said Pierre in a tone that proved he did not think it "very well" that some one else should get ahead of him in seeing their mutual friend. He was comforted a moment after by Rex's return, boots in hand, but with a long face.

"Well?" queried Pierre, still standing in the doorway.

"He is sound asleep, and snoring away like a band of music. I didn't dare wake him, for Aunt Schenck said I shouldn't. I had the greatest mind, though, to drop the boots on the floor and start him, for I do want to take him up to the Look-out Room before school-time. He has made an immense collection of insects, and wants to see mine. That man is a regular brick, I tell you, Pierre Willoughby!"

Pierre showed a sad lack of interest in the entomological tastes of the sleeping guest, and gave a sigh as he turned from Rex to make his way to the breakfast-room.

It was, after all, John who had the pleasure of introducing Professor Coleman to the scene

of the various industries of the Pantops family. Pierre had eaten his breakfast and gone reluctantly to the drug-store, and Laurie had entered upon his day's labor at the printing-office, before the laggard professor made his way down to the morning meal. Rex had been sent to the village on an errand for his aunt, and John was the only boy at hand to give a morning greeting to the much-valued guest. The table still stood, bright and neat with its regular breakfast-adornings, but Mrs. Schenck, grown impatient with waiting for the tardy gentleman, was bustling about with great energy in the china-closet in order to waste no time. At sight of him she smoothed the wrinkles from her forehead and took her seat at the coffee-urn. John was there with a fresh bouquet to adorn the table, and with ready courtesy stationed himself behind the professor's chair, that he might anticipate each want.

The latter inquired where the other boys were, and when told that they were already away at work peered at John from beneath his shaggy brows and said, "Tut, tut, tut, lad! this will never do. So you are the only drone in the hive? Give an account of yourself."

John bit his lip with an instant's annoyance, for the assurance, started by the conversation of the previous evening, that he did not stand as high as his cousins in the professor's good graces was revived by this reproof.

"Perhaps, sir, I have been making honey while you were finishing your morning nap."

"Perhaps!" responded the guest with a queer little nod. "Pass me the salt, boy."

"Let me fill your cup, Anthony," said the lady behind the coffee-urn. "I fear you will have but a wearisome day," she remarked as she handed back the cup. "This is a dull old place, as you know. To be sure, you and brother Henry used to make things lively enough, but now he is gone, and you will hardly care to go out fishing or gunning by yourself."

"I have no fears, Eliza, on that score; I am used to being my own entertainer. Besides, I want to look around the place and revisit my old haunts. Then I propose making some calls in the village; some of the elders there will be sure to remember Anthony Coleman."

"No doubt of that," said Mrs. Schenck.

"I am going to explore the old house too, with your permission. It will bring back

many a merry hour spent within these walls. I am in a hurry to visit the Look-out Room, Eliza. It will do me good to meditate a while up there."

"Why, sir," exclaimed John, starting forward, "do you know the Look-out Room? It's the jolliest place! I should like to go with you when you have finished breakfast; we boys have all kind of things going on up there."

"I am ready," said the professor, rising; "by all means be my conductor."

At this moment, Rex appeared, red-faced and flurried, having barely time to explain to his aunt the result of his errand, pick up his books, and rush off to school.

"Good-bye, professor," he panted, short of breath with running. "I wanted to show you my insects, but *tempus fugit*.—Aunt Schenck," exclaimed he as a bright thought flashed through his mind, "can't I get excused at recess? I've got *such* a headache!"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Schenck sharply; and Rex knew by the tone in which that word was ejaculated that further entreaty was useless. He ran off without delay, pondering all the way to school how delightful it would

be to have a stroll in the woods and a talk with his father's old friend. His head did not ache so badly as he wished it did for the sake of having a thoroughly honest excuse; still, he was sure an hour or two in the fresh air was exactly what his health required. The school-house was reached, but not in time for Rex to answer "Present" to his name in the roll-call. He got quieted off in a few minutes, and was thumping his breast vigorously to get a column of hard words duly arranged in his mind, forgetful of headache, professor, and everything else but the matter in hand. At ten years of age one has no leisure to waste in regrets.

Meanwhile, John and Professor Coleman were seated in the Look-out Room, John eagerly explaining the divisions of territory, and the professor with moist eyes listening to the boy and at the same time gazing through Edna's window—not at the village houses, but far beyond them at the scenes whose memory they revived of bygone pleasures and a long-lost friend.

Auntie Blanche hobbled in to exchange a "How-d'ye?" with "Marse Anthony." In her eyes the learned college professor was still the

fun-loving, frolicsome youth of former years, and she astonished John not a little by addressing him with quite as much familiarity as she did the present generation of Pantops boys.

"So this bracket-saw is your specialty, Master John?" said Professor Coleman as he began examining this last hobby of the fickle-minded young Westerner.

John, with much animation, produced his rolls of patterns and his assortment of fancy woods, and while the guest was examining these he ran down stairs to collect the different articles he had made with the saw. The professor looked at all the pretty trifles with flattering attention, and, selecting two from the number, began to criticise. One of these was John's most elaborate effort, a Swiss clock-case; the other a simple paper-knife. John's eyes sparkled; he was sure to gain a few words of commendation from this gruff man who had pronounced him fit for a dry-goods clerk and as much as prophesied that he never would succeed in life for lack of perseverance.

"This," said the professor, touching the clock-case, "is a fanciful design, but the carving is careless; the two sides are not alike;

this leaf—do you see?—is very narrow and pointed, and this, which should match it exactly, is nearly round. Here too is a rough edge which needs sand-papering. Now this,” and he picked up the paper-knife as he spoke, “is a much simpler article, but it pleases me far better. You took pains here; every line is true, and it is neatly finished off. Go on doing such work as this, and in time you will excel.”

Now, all this commendation of the paper-knife, by which Professor Coleman supposed he was encouraging his young friend, was really hurting John sadly. The paper-knife was one of several things which he had begun and had cast aside unfinished because the saw broke or he took a new fancy. It was the patient Laurie, who could never bear to see a thing thrown away which had in it a possibility of beauty, that had spent some “odd moments” in completing his cousin’s discarded attempt.

“Yes,” continued the professor, noticing John’s gloomy silence, “this does you credit. It is the best finished article here.”

“The credit belongs to Laurence, and not to me, sir,” was the honest response. “I

can't ever go on working at things when they bother me—I throw them aside and begin afresh ; but Laurie was born to be a cobbler ; he delights in patching up old things and making something out of nothing. I wouldn't be bothered with such jobs."

"You pay your cousin a high compliment," said the professor, looking pleased ; "and you deserve a compliment yourself, my boy, for your honesty in refusing to accept praise that is not your due. I like you all the better for this, John Schenck," he continued, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Truth and perseverance are two essential things, but if you are only to have one, you are gifted with the best of the two virtues."

John heard in silence, and commenced gathering up his specimens of wood-carving, while the professor turned to Laurie's table and began turning over the sketches in his portfolio ; but in his heart John was resolving to have a hand-to-hand fight with his well-known failing, and to prove some day to this character-reading man that he was capable of "sticking to" an undertaking as well as anybody.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GARDEN TALK.

AT noon Rex bounced into the quiet house like the noisy human ball he was, leaving every door open behind him as he went whistling through the hall in search of his new friend. Mrs. Schenck met him with indignation on the stairs, and sent him back to shut the doors. Rex could not stop whistling, but his aunt's aspect changed the tune from "Yankee Doodle" to "Martyrs." He wondered why his aunt always had the doors and windows closed. What if the flies did come in? Flies were not half so bad as a gloomy house. Aunt Schenck's rule was a continual negative—no flies, no sunshine, no noise, no dirt—and Rex believed she would have added to the list of prohibitions "No boys," had it been possible.

Having closed every door, the boy bounced up stairs again. "Where is Professor Coleman?" he asked.

"Don't know," was the curt reply.

"I seen him down by the stream a few minutes ago," said one of the maids, who under Mrs. Schenck's direction was sweeping down imaginary cobwebs.

"What was he doing?" asked Rex.

"Shovelling up mud and putting it in a bottle.—I do declare he was, ma'am," said the girl with a giggle. Out of deference for her mistress she refrained from announcing the decision that she and the cook had come to, that the poor gentleman was out of his mind and needed watching.

"Good!" shouted Rex, and was off like a flash to the garden, this time leaving a new set of doors wide open for the flies and sunshine to enter as they would.

The professor was discovered lounging on one of the garden-seats reading a paper, but took an upright position as Rex approached.

"I've found you at last!" cried the heated boy. "Please tell me, professor, what you are going to do with the mud: Jane says you were shovelling it up and putting it in a bottle."

"She did, did she? Jane and I will have a quarrel, I'm afraid, before I go. Yesterday I succeeded in capturing a beautiful moth. I

put it under a tumbler in my room, meaning to take it home to dissect it for the microscope; but Jane, who has evidently no turn for science, has let go the prisoner and put the tumbler back in its place. I must take care of my precious mud, or she will be washing out the bottle. There is such a thing as being too neat—eh, my boy?”

“That there is, sir!” replied Rex with such unwonted emphasis that the professor looked in his face curiously. Rex was of course thinking less of Jane than of Jane’s mistress, but he was too respectful to his aunt to give his unruly thoughts expression.

“What are you going to do with the mud, sir?” he inquired.

The professor drew from his pocket a small phial filled with muddy water, and handed it to his companion. “That looks rich,” said he.

Rex was perplexed.

“Ah, I see you have not yet learned to use that key to a world’s museum of wonders, the microscope.”

“No, sir,” said Rex. “I have never seen but one: that was once when I was away on a visit. I only know about things that are big

enough to be seen with the eye, and very few of those."

"Well! well! all will come in good time. You can find enough to occupy you in the larger forms of insect-life for a good while to come. Maybe one of these days old Santa Claus will put a microscope in your stocking. I must tell you about this mud: it is full of diatoms."

"And what are they?" asked the boy, who could see nothing very interesting in a phial of dirty water.

"Diatoms are very tiny shells formed of siliceous matter, with a little coloring-matter to them; sometimes they are called 'brittleworts,' because they break apart from each other so readily. The name *diatom* means 'something cut through the middle.' These little shells are really two valves united at the edge."

"But, sir," said Rex, who had taken a seat beside his friend and was trying his best to feel interested, "I see nothing at all but dirt in the bottle: where are the diatoms?"

"In the midst of the dirt, my boy. The trouble is with your eyes, bright as they are. I have something in my pocket that will help them to discover the treasures."

So saying, the professor produced what was a most wonderful instrument in Rex's eyes, a pocket microscope.

"Now look," said he, "and tell me what you discover in the dirty water."

"There are some whitish specks," said Rex, peering through the glass with all his might.

"Those specks are the diatoms. If I had a large microscope at hand, you would see them magnified five hundred diameters. I doubt if, after spending a day in company with a good microscope, you would continue to be satisfied with the study of such objects as can be seen with the naked eye."

"Then," said Rex, "it is just as well for me that I can't see the microscope. I should begin wanting what I could not possibly have. Aunt Schenck would tell you, sir, that you ought not to put notions in my head."

"Humph!" was the reply.

"Do you always carry this glass about with you, professor?"

"Yes; that has been thousands of miles in my pocket, and it has revealed unlimited marvels to me. Think of it, boy! Every step you take brings you within reach of objects which would afford you material for years of study;

yes, every step," repeated the professor, noticing his companion's incredulous look. "Have you not geology under foot, botany at arm's length, astronomy over head, entomology—a little too much of that"—the speaker was trying in vain to kill a mosquito; "meteorology too, and I know not how many things besides? Ah, you might become a learned man without stirring from this garden—"

"If I had a library of books treating of all the sciences you have named, sir."

"Books? bah! Have you not the things themselves? The very best books on these subjects are but the results of somebody else's use of his eyes and ears. Use your own eyes, my boy, and when they have done all they can for you, then get books."

This counsel was very strongly in accordance with Rex's taste. For reading or study he had little inclination, but the ever-open volume of the great "out-doors" had for him an untiring charm.

"May I look at your glass, sir?"

The professor handed it to the boy with a smile at some thought of his own. Rex looked in his face a full minute, expecting an explanation of it, but none was given.

"Be off!" said the professor; "find something worth looking at, and bring it to show me."

With these words he stretched himself at full length on the seat, flung his handkerchief over his face, and left Rex alone with the wonderful little instrument which had the power to reveal to him untold wonders. Where should he go? what object should he first select? He found himself standing by a large rosebush, one of Edna's special pets. There were no roses in bloom at this late season, but, what was more beautiful to the eyes of Rex in his present mood, there were a couple of cocoons fastened among the parched leaves, a spider was industriously spinning his web between this bush and its next neighbor, while at the same moment a large, bright-hued butterfly fluttered above his head.

Rex gave a chuckle of delight: here was a miniature museum within easy reach. The threads of the cocoon would be worth examining under the microscope; the spider's legs would be a curious study; and he longed, above all, to examine the down on the butterfly's wings with something more powerful than his own eyesight. Directly both cocoon and spider

were in the grasp of the aspiring naturalist; but the tantalizing butterfly, having lighted on the rosebush almost under the hand of its pursuer, rested there motionless until Rex thought he had it fairly in his grasp, but on opening his hand he found it empty, and the wings he had coveted for scientific investigation were moving gayly in the sunshine at a height too great for easy acquisition. It was much too warm a day for further chase, and Rex concluded to remain content with the cocoon and spider for this time. He came back to the professor, whom he found still lying on the seat, snoring heavily.

“What a lazy man!” murmured Rex under his breath. “If I were a college professor, and knew as much as he does, I guess I would find better use for my time than sleeping it all away.”

Rex was eager to have the professor look at his prizes with him and to hear him talk. The moments were slipping by, the golden odd moments of the noon recess, and—oh dear! why did people have to eat?—there was the dinner-bell, and Pierre’s whistle from the back door told plainly that he was in a hurry. Rex gently lifted the handkerchief from the

face of the sleeper, and shouted in his ear, "Dinner!" upon which the unconscious musician gave a great snort and started up.

"Dinner, eh?—so soon? I believe I must have forgotten myself a moment. Haven't found any object yet for the microscope?"

While he questioned the professor was stretching his limbs and smoothing as best he could the wrinkles from his linen coat. Rex handed back the microscope with disappointment expressed on every feature of his chubby face.

"I hoped we would get time to see the threads of this cocoon and examine the legs of this spider with the glass," said he.

"Well, after dinner let us do so."

"School," ejaculated Rex.

Laurie and Pierre now approached by the turn of the garden-path, each eager to have a word with their guest, and half provoked with the youngest brother for having monopolized him so long. They took possession of the still sleepy professor, one on each side, and hurried him to the house, leaving poor Rex in the rear; but the latter was greatly cheered by a backward look and nod and the words, "A walk after school."

"'Tisn't fair," said Laurie. "Rex has more time than any of us—that is, except John.—Professor, are you going to stay a real good long time at Pantops?"

"I must be in New York by Friday evening," was the reply that brought an exclamation of disapproval from all three hearers.

"Why must you?" asked Laurie; then he flushed and tossed back his hair at the thought of his rudeness in asking such a direct question.

"There is a meeting to be held by a society of chemists on that evening which I am very anxious to attend."

"And this is Wednesday!" said Pierre regretfully.

"Here I am at your disposal, young gentlemen, for the remainder of this day and the whole of to-morrow: I need not start until Friday morning."

Mrs. Schenck received the tardy group with a severe countenance when at last they entered the dining-room. She looked hot and weary, yet with tireless energy was waging war with a refractory fly that somebody—probably Rex—had admitted into the carefully-darkened apartment.

"Boys, I wonder you have no more politeness than to keep Professor Coleman from his dinner? The vegetables are nearly cold."

"So much the better, I should say," replied Pierre, "on such a day as this."

"Anthony," said the lady, "you do wrong to encourage these boys in such familiarity. They leave you no peace. There is some excuse for them in the fact that we seldom have visitors, and they have to make the most of one when he comes."

"Thank you, Aunt Schenck," said Rex, with such heartiness that the professor looked across the table at him with a laugh.

The fact was, that Mrs. Schenck often found fault, and rarely excuses, so that any concession on her part was received with gratitude by her nephews.

When dinner was over, and the young Willoughbys had returned reluctantly to their several duties at store, office, and school, the professor retired to his room to rest and cool off. This disposal of himself was well pleasing to Mrs. Schenck, for in her esteem a man was a creature who always made a litter around, who opened blinds that should be shut, letting in light and flies and dust, and who gen-

erally carried a cloud of tobacco-smoke about with him to scent the curtains and blacken the walls. As to this last-named infirmity, Professor Coleman was blameless, but perhaps he made up for his virtuous indifference to tobacco by an unusual degree, even for a man, of carelessness in leaving things around. He left his newspapers scattered on the floors of the various rooms; he dropped crumbs under his seat at table; he spilled ink on the toilette-mats of the spare room; and left bugs and bottles lying at haphazard on its mantel and bureau. Nevertheless, for the sake of the bygone days when they two were young together,* Mrs. Schenck looked leniently upon these shortcomings.

When the professor started out, late in the afternoon, to meet Reginald on his way from school, he had in his pocket a note addressed to a certain business-firm containing an order the fulfilment of which was to bring joy to the heart of a little boy who at that very moment was groaning at his desk over a "horrid sum" that would not come right.

CHAPTER XIV.

LET OUT ON SHARES.

ON Thursday, the last day of Professor Coleman's visit at Pantops, not an hour's leisure was given him for a nap in the garden or quiet reading in his room. The boys agreed to form a joint-stock company and each accept his share of the day.

Laurie's portion came first. He was a shyer boy than either of his brothers, and so, while feeling a desire for the society of his father's friend quite as strongly as the others, he had kept out of his presence, and in no way had called the professor's attention to himself. For all that, the quiet little artist had won a warm place in the regard of the Pantops guest, and when the plan was merrily announced that he was to be divided equally among four boys for that one day, he put his hand on Laurie's shoulder and declared that his share should come first—that he would get up at sunrise

and go with him over the hills and far away to see the pretty views of Questiford. This was a plan after Laurie's own heart, and, though he only answered, "Yes, sir," the two monosyllables expressed a deal of satisfaction.

According to arrangement, then, Laurie tapped at the professor's door when the first bright streaks of dawn were visible. The gentle knocks were not nearly so loud as the snores of the sleeper, so Laurie summoned his courage, opened the door, and called, "Please get up, sir." His mild tones were utterly ineffectual in presence of such complete unconsciousness, and had not a friendly mosquito settled on the gentleman's nose at the instant when he gave his loudest summons, it is probable that the present stockholder would have lost his share. As it was, the professor was in his clothes and out of the house in a remarkably short time, and a long walk was taken, which to Laurie was so important an event as to be afterward duly set down by him in the old Family Record.

The boy led the way to the rustic bridge, and along the road by the water's edge to the spot whence he had sketched what he considered his finest picture. It was at all times

a charming walk, and now, with the freshness of the morning air on their brows, the first notes of the birds in their ears, and a landscape spread before their eyes which, aside from its beauty, was bound by dear associations to the heart of each, these two, the man and the boy, felt a joy akin to that which Adam might have experienced when he first beheld his Paradise. They rested on the knoll where the unfortunate paints had fallen and been soaked by the rain, and all at once the reserved Laurence began giving his companion a history of that affair, and from one thing went on to another until the man who a week ago had been unknown to him even by name held possession of the key to his heart.

"You do not want to be a printer, eh?" Laurie shook his head and made a wry face. "What, then?"

Laurie opened his eyes wide at the question. Was there any one thing in the world that he could want to be but an artist? His friend should know this without making him put the longing of his soul in so many words.

"Perhaps Providence will one day open the way for you, my son."

"I can't see how," was the gloomy response. "I must work for my living straight on through the very years that I ought to be studying art. There are no opportunities, either, in Questiford, and there is no chance of my getting away from here as long as I live."

"That is very sad," replied the professor, but something in his tone made Laurie look in his face, and there he saw a smile.

"I see no possibility of your realizing your hopes in that case. We don't often see our chances until they are right in our way, and only God knows what good thing awaits you in that 'as long as I live.'"

"What must I do, then? Just plod along at the office and grow up an ignoramus, waiting for that possible 'good thing'?" Laurence hung his head and asked the questions in a hard, hopeless way that troubled his good friend.

"Just so," he answered—"plod along at the office, but all the while be aiming at the best that is possible to you. Draw, paint, study, seize every help that friends or books can give, and so be ready to make the most of the 'good thing.'"

The two walked along soberly after this, each thinking his own thoughts. Laurie began to fear that, after all, his share in the family stock for the day was not going to bring him in much profit, when suddenly his companion broke the long silence :

“Would you care to take a trip to Europe?”

“Care—to—take—a—trip—to—Europe?” the boy repeated, emphasizing each word, as a miser might if asked if he would care to receive a ship laden with gold.

“I don’t mean that I can take you there,” the professor hurriedly interposed, fearing that his words might lead to false hopes. “If I were only a millionaire instead of a poor teacher,—*if* I were, it should make a difference in the lives of three boys that I know.”

Laurie laughed, and the change in his face was as if the sun had suddenly appeared from behind a cloud. He took his companion’s hand between both of his and gave disjointed expression to his thanks for the good-will that he felt to be sincere and earnest.

They reached home in season for breakfast, since the cook had overslept herself and it was fifteen minutes later than usual.

As they ran up stairs to brush off the dust before appearing in the dining-room, the professor abruptly inquired, "What sort of pen-man are you?"

"Fair, I believe, sir; there is a specimen." Laurie drew a small blank-book from his pocket which he kept for copying passages from books that he read, and handed it to the professor.

The writing was much more than fair, as his friend saw at one glance. The letters were neat and well formed, as befitted an artist-boy.

"How old are you?" was the next question.

"Thirteen my last birthday, sir."

They had reached the stair-landing, and there parted, without any further words, to their different rooms.

"I guess he thinks I don't know much for my age," murmured Laurie to his reflection in the glass as he stood fiercely brushing back the wilful lock of hair from his forehead.

The professor, already on his way down to breakfast, was saying to himself, "The very thing! Must note that down, and see to it as soon as I get home."

There was an eager group ready to greet

the family friend as he entered the dining-room. Evidently, they had been talking about him, probably settling the "turns" by which each should take possession of him.

"It is just as well for you, Anthony, that you must be off to-morrow," said the lady at the head of the table. "I wonder you can stand it as you do, particularly when the weather is so oppressive."

"Stand what, Aunt Schenck?" inquired the senior member of the stock company.

"Why to be followed up every step he takes, and talked to, and bored as none but half-grown persons can bore one. I am glad you boys are not so fond of me as all that."

Mrs. Schenck was at a loss to know the reason of the smile that passed around the table as she concluded her remark.

By general consent, John took his share in the professor's time during the hours when the others were absent at their various occupations. When all had started off, and when Mrs. Schenck had been allowed a little chat with her old friend during her methodical washing up of the breakfast-cups, John gently tapped him on the shoulder as a reminder that he was under authority for that day.

"At your service," was the ready response; "what do you propose doing with me?"

"The Look-out Room is the regular place for a talk," said the boy; "suppose we go there, sir?"

"John, how can you?" interposed his mother. "It will be as hot as an oven up there. I can't abide that room."

"That's because you are not allowed there, mother," said John saucily. "It can't be very hot when there is a window at each point of the compass, and we can have the benefit of every wind that blows."

Mrs. Schenck made some reply, but it was unheard by John, who was already up stairs and passing through the winding passage that led to the Look-out Room, with the professor close behind.

A disagreeable odor met them at the foot of the stairway that led directly to the museum.

"Bah!" exclaimed John; "what can this be? I'm sure mother has not been in this part of the house to-day, for she can't endure bad smells."

"Perhaps a dead mouse in the wall," suggested the professor, who was holding his handkerchief to his nose.

"More likely it is some of Rex's work, sir. That fellow is always bringing in creatures, alive or dead. I shouldn't wonder if he has caught something and is keeping it to stuff. Phew!"

John threw open the door into the Look-out Room, and there on Rex's table lay the evident cause of the disturbing odor—a pretty little bird partially prepared for stuffing, and with a bottle of arsenic standing beside it, which, unfortunately, had not been applied in season.

"Ah! here is a disappointment for poor Reginald!" said the professor. "It was my fault, and I will make all proper excuses to Eliza for it. I wanted to see the process of stuffing—taxidermy I believe it is called—and it was especially to please me that he caught the bird and began the work."

"Why didn't he finish it?" asked John. There was a tone of something like exultation in his voice as he added, "It seems that John is not the only fellow who begins things and leaves them half done."

"I remember now. Rex was summoned down stairs to run to the store when he was in the midst of this work yesterday morning,

and his day was so full of other interests that probably he never thought of it again: I did not."

"But he'll get a scolding, all the same," said John. "Mother has forbidden all such work during hot weather."

"I will find her at once and apologize for both Rex and myself; and do you, John, call up the maid to remove the cause of all the trouble."

Being fairly driven out of the favorite resort, the two companions finally established themselves on the piazza, where the running roses and honeysuckles made a fragrant shade from the sun's rays and a slight breeze was stirring.

"Pantops is a goodly place; there are not many youngsters blessed with such a home."

The professor made this remark more to himself than the boy beside him, for he was thinking of his own youth and its associations with the home of his friend Henry Willoughby. It was, however, answered by a sigh, and John replied that he loved the place dearly, and could not bear the thought of leaving it so soon.

"You will have vacations from time to

time no doubt, and then you can come on to see your mother and cousins. New York is not very far away."

"No, sir, but I shall— That is, I mean to work very hard to get a home for mother and myself there. It is only right that I should."

"Spoken like a man!" exclaimed the professor. "It is right that you should look forward to providing for your mother, but that will require steady, plodding labor, with no getting tired and giving up when difficulties arise."

"I know that—indeed I know it—and I am going to try my very best to persevere."

John made a sudden dart into the house, chiefly to subdue a chokiness that was rising in his throat, though avowedly to bring down his latest piece of work on the scroll-saw. It seemed to take him a good while to find it, but when he did return it was with a bright face and cheery voice. He placed in the professor's hand a dainty little match-box cut in a delicate pattern and inlaid with wood of contrasting color.

"I want to know if that will stand your criticism, sir? I have taken more pains over it than anything I have cut out before."

"You did this all yourself?"

"Every bit, sir."

"Laurie did not finish it off?"

John's face flushed, but he answered, "No, sir; Laurie has not even seen it."

"It does you great credit; I never saw a neater specimen of workmanship. After all, there is more good material in you, John Schenck, than I gave you credit for at first."

This did not sound like much of a compliment, but it pleased John greatly. The professor's lack of confidence in him had disturbed him so completely that he had made an indignant resolve to win a good word from him somehow before he went away. The professor handed him back the pretty trifle.

"Please take it home with you to keep your matches in: I made it specially for you, sir; that is, I waited to see whether you thought it good enough."

"Quite good enough, and I appreciate your gift; but how do you suppose I am to carry that fragile thing on a long journey? I have only a bag with me, you know."

"I'll get mother to pack it nicely in a little box that can easily go in your bag;" and John moved away to carry out his proposal, but the gentleman detained him:

"If you will get the box and pack it yourself, I will take it, but if you get your mother to do it, I will not."

"Why?" asked John in surprise.

"Because a boy who is about to go out in the world to begin life for himself ought to be more independent than that. You are now to do things for your mother, instead of depending on her to do them for you."

"He is a little too hard on a fellow," said John to himself; nevertheless, he started off at once in search of box, cotton, and string. When the professor returned to his room he found a neat, compact little package placed on his table beside other things that were to be put in his bag, and laughed to himself with pleasure at the thought of John's victory over his fault.

The noon meal brought all the boys together, and a merry set they were. Rex was especially gleeful, since he had earned a half-holiday from school by doing double duty in the morning, and now was looking forward to unquestioned possession of the professor until Pierre should return from the store at supper-time. Even his aunt's grim looks could not dispel the sunshine of his anticipations.

"I have a word to say to you, Reginald," remarked the latter in a very ominous tone as they rose from the table.

The boy's face assumed a frightened expression at once, as his mind darted backward to discover what possible omission or commission was to be brought up against him.

"A bottle of cologne or a scent-bag would be an appropriate present for you to give mother," interposed John. "Get Pierre to bring you a good strong one from the store."

"Your jokes are ill-timed, John," said his mother coldly.—"Reginald, come with me to my room a few moments."

Rex followed his aunt out of the dining-room and up stairs with a very crestfallen look, and did not appear again until the other boys had left the house to resume work for the afternoon. The professor, surmising that Rex was enduring punishment of some sort, felt very sorry, inasmuch as he had really been the cause of his disobedience to the strict rule of the establishment—namely, "No taxidermy in warm weather." All he could do, however, was to wait down stairs for the culprit's release. Rex's face was a good deal longer when at last he rejoined his friend.

"What are you going to do with me, Rex, seeing that I am your property now?"

"Suppose we take a walk and find things to examine with your microscope?" said Rex, instantly brightening.

"It seems to me quite too warm for that, but then it is for you to decide."

The professor wiped the beads of perspiration from his brow and looked at Rex deprecatingly.

"I beg pardon, sir; I didn't think," said the boy, who, being a boy, never concerned himself with the state of the thermometer when any pleasure was under consideration. "Then," he added after a moment's reflection, "would you mind coming to the Look-out Room? I have not had a chance to show you my insects and birds and aquarium." Rex had an honest pride in his museum.

"You are an industrious little fellow," was the professor's hearty comment when he had duly admired owl and butterflies, guinea-pig and birds. "I am truly astonished at the amount you boys accomplish in the intervals of real work."

"It is because we make use of all our odd moments; we are real economical about them."

"So I should think. And who taught you to use so wisely what most young people throw away as having no value?"

"Edna did: Edna is just the best sister that ever was. I am sorry she is not here to see you. Pantops is a good deal pleasanter for us all when she is at home."

"No doubt of it;" and the rueful expression on the boy's face brought a sympathizing one to that of his companion. "I saw your sister, Rex, when she was a little child. I judge that she has grown to be very much such a woman as her mother was before her."

From this ensued a conversation of deep interest to the old friend of Henry and Helen Willoughby and to their little son. It might have lasted all the afternoon but for an interruption. Victor had no notion of allowing his master to be in the house a longer time than usual without sharing his attention, and the thoughts of both the professor and Rex were brought instantly from the by-gones to present time by Victor's voice at the door, now in whines of pitiful entreaty, now in sharp, shrill snaps of reproach, while he kept up a brisk accompaniment of scratches and frequent thumps of his tail on the floor.



"Victor dashed in, bounded on his master, and licked his hands."

"Poor fellow! poor fellow! Quiet, out there!" called his master, unwilling to interrupt the narration of a certain hunting-expedition when young Anthony Coleman and his friend Henry Willoughby had got lost in the woods and had nearly starved to death; but Victor regarded not the interest of the story in his eagerness to be admitted. Rex rose finally, a little vexed at the dog's perseverance, and opened the door. Victor dashed in, bounded on his master, and licked his hands with such extravagance of delight that one might suppose the separation had been one of months instead of little more than an hour.

"How d'ye do, Rex? Beg pardon, but couldn't hold out no longer 'thout seeing you."

Rex and the professor both looked in surprise at the open door. Victor had been asking admission for Reed Remsen as well as himself. Rex instantly attended to the proprieties by introducing his two friends, with an inward chuckle at the fun of the thing, mingled with a vague doubt as to whether one of the twain might not resent it as an insult. Reed made the best bow he could

manage in the direction of the strange gentleman, but kept his stand in the doorway, nervously working the toes of his bare feet. Rex gave a glance of inquiry at the professor, and was altogether reassured by the twinkle visible under the shaggy brows.

"Come in, Reed. Where have you kept yourself all the time lately?"

"I've been wantin' to come, bad; I've watched you every day when school was out, but you come home these times like a streak o' lightnin'. Thinks I, 'Reed Remsen, better stay away and feel lonesome than go where you ain't wanted.'"

These remarks, being made in a hoarse whisper to Rex, who had withdrawn with Victor and Reed to the other end of the room, were supposed to be unheard by the professor, who had turned his back on the party and was watching the fishes in the aquarium. Presently the two oddly-matched associates came to where he stood, and Reed looked into the jar with lively interest.

"All thrivin' and kickin', eh?" said he; "but what has 'come of all your tadpoles?"

"They outgrew their quarters pretty quick," Rex replied, "and I had to take them out."

"Queer now, ain't it?" and Reed glanced seriously in the professor's face, evidently expecting him to be as much amused at the transition of tadpoles into frogs as he was himself.

"Rex has quite a successful aquarium," said the gentleman. "I presume, as you are a friend of his, you have seen it before."

Reed giggled. "Why, sir," said he, "I helped Rex make that 'quarium; didn't I now, Rex? I caught the critters for him, mostly. Couldn't have got it fixed up if't hadn't been for me; could you now, Rex?"

Thus appealed to, Rex shook his head. It was Reed Remsen's special pride that he was an able assistant to the Willoughby boys, and that no one of them could get along in his special department without his aid.

Professor Coleman gave Rex some useful suggestions as to the management of aquaria, to which Reed listened with open-eyed wonder. He described to them the great aquarium at the London Zoological Gardens, and held them spellbound as he discoursed on the nature and habits of various monsters of the deep.

"Professor, I believe you do know every-

thing!" cried Rex. "How *did* you learn so much?"

The professor's face held a mingled expression of amusement at the lad's enthusiastic admiration and regret that really, according to his mature judgment of himself, he had accomplished so little in all the years of his life. A moment's whispering took place between the boys, and then Rex asked his friend, as a great favor, to allow Reed to see his pocket-glass.

"Of course I will, with pleasure," said he.

"And if we take umbrellas and fans, and put grape-leaves in your hat, and walk very slowly—"

"Yes, yes, you rogue! My glass and myself are at your disposal; make the most of us both, for you may not soon have another chance. I wonder if Questiford would be greatly shocked if I were to go in my shirt-sleeves?"

"No, sir; everybody does that in Questiford; and we need not go through the village at all."

A few moments later Mrs. Schenck, looking from her window, saw the party, with Victor at their heels, leisurely moving up the

road, and wondered for the hundredth time how Anthony Coleman could allow himself to be so pestered with those boys. On the return from this walk Rex was almost beside himself with delight. He had seen and heard enough to keep him thinking for a year, he said. Reed's homely face was beaming with the possession of new ideas, and he mused with regret on his way home on his bashfulness and dread of strangers that had deprived him of so much probable enjoyment. He had indeed skulked around Pantops whenever he had dared, for without daily communication with its inmates life was objectless to him; but he had lost the feeling of freedom ever since the change in housekeepers; he had never got much acquainted with John, and especially since the advent of a real live college professor had he felt awed into keeping himself at a respectful distance, until, as he had told Rex, he "couldn't hold out no longer."

Pierre could hardly wait for the evening meal to be finished, so eager was he to get the professor up into the laboratory with him, but patience was a necessity. As eldest brother he sat at the foot of the table and waited on

the family, and Aunt Schenck frowned on any appearance of haste. Besides, the professor and Rex had come in hungry from their walk, and had so much to talk about too that it seemed as if they never would be ready to rise from the table. Patience brought its reward at last, however, and while the rest of the family resorted to the piazza, Pierre captured the professor and led him up to the Look-out Room.

“Never was such a room as this,” remarked that gentleman, who was getting a little tired of being invited up the stairs to its retirement so many times in the interests of as many departments of science and art as there were boys in the household. He resigned himself with a good grace to the present demand, all the more easily as chemistry was his special pursuit. Hours passed away, and it grew late, according to Pantops ideas, for the family to be up, even on a summer night, and still Pierre and the professor lingered in the laboratory. Finally, Mrs. Schenck resolved to interfere in her guest’s behalf, and after she had vainly knocked several times at the door she opened it and peremptorily bade Pierre put away his things and let the professor go to bed.

CHAPTER XV.

GOINGS AND COMINGS.

THE next morning Professor Coleman left Pantops. His visit had been an event of great importance in the quiet lives of the young Willoughbys. Seldom in their retired home-nook had they met with persons of even ordinary cultivation, and the presence of a superior man like this—one, too, who not only knew everything, as Rex was positive he did, but took pleasure in sharing with them his knowledge—was something to be enjoyed in remembrance almost as much as at the time. Four pages of the Family Record were filled with accounts by four different scribes of this visit. It was hard for several days for the boys to settle themselves contentedly to regular occupations ; the printing-office, the drug-store, the school, and even the varied interests for which John had abundant leisure, became all at once wearily monotonous. Yet the practical sugges-

tions given to each boy by their wise friend sprang up like good seed sown in fertile soil, and who should say how rich a harvest might be reaped in years to come? Certainly, Rex devoted himself to his study of natural history, Laurie to his pictures, Pierre to his chemistry, with increased zeal after the professor's visit.

Edna's long absence ended at last, and the day of her return was kept as a high holiday at Pantops. She had had a delightful visit, and had endless accounts to give of pretty places seen and agreeable people met; "but the very best of all," said the motherly sister, "was the getting back to the dear home and the blessed boys." She had to listen to four different and equally enthusiastic descriptions of the recent visitor, and it seemed to her that every other sentence was a quotation from Professor Coleman. She declared herself jealous of this wonderful stranger who had so bewitched the family as to leave them no opportunity for missing her. Edna could not have said this so cheerily had there been the faintest idea in her heart that such a thing was possible.

The brackets, the source of so much trouble to John, were highly appreciated by grateful

Edna, and she thanked both boys over and over again for their beautiful gift. Every word she said about them made John feel the more humbled at the remembrance of the foolish way in which he had acted about them.

The pleasure of the family reunion was a good deal marred by the anticipation of John's departure. In spite of first impressions, the attachment between the young Willoughbys and their so-called cousin had grown very strong. John's best qualities had been brought to the surface, his bad ones shamed into at least temporary retirement, under the influences of Pantops: he was far more manly than when he came from the West.

Then came the days of packing and leave-taking, of parting gifts and promises of frequent letters, and of long talks together in the dear Look-out Room. Such air-castles as were built then surpass the conception of anybody past his teens. John intended to work hard, rise rapidly to a superior position in the business, earn plenty of money, buy a house, and send for his mother to come on and live with him. With his surplus wealth he intended to give every member of the Pantops

family the special desire of their hearts, even down to Auntie Blanche, who coveted above all things a pair of specs with shiny silver rims.

"Don't forget what Professor Coleman said about your lack of the adhesive property," said Pierre in jesting earnestness.

"I shall *never* forget what Professor Coleman said," was John's reply in such solemn tones that Edna looked into his face amazed. She had never heard the easy-going John speak so gravely before; she marvelled what had come over him.

"Take me to Europe, won't you, John, when that fortune is made? That is the thing I most long for and least expect;" and John answered, as gayly as Laurie had asked, that such was his intention as soon as his ship should come in.

One September morning the Questiford stage rolled up to the house, and John took one farewell look at the dear faces gathered at the gate, and another at the pleasant old homestead, and was whirled away till even the tops of the great elms could no longer be seen. Thus an important chapter was closed in the life of John Schenck, and a new and more important one was about to open.

It was some time before things settled down to the usual clockwork regularity of the quiet place. All these happenings had made it hard for everybody to return easily to the well-established routine of duties that had filled up the days before Edna's going away, the professor's visit, and John's departure. Mrs. Schenck came down stairs o' mornings with red eyes, which she accounted for as the result of headache. The young people began to wonder if it were possible for Aunt Schenck to love even John enough to lie awake at night and cry. For all that, she bustled about the house, scolded the servants, and worried Edna with her rules the same as ever.

In the Look-out Room things were moved back to their old places. Edna's desk again stood at the west window, and pages of bright little stories for children's periodicals were scattered upon it as before. Doubtless new plots were developed from the scenes and acquaintances that had enlarged the author's experience of life and Nature during her absence. John's scroll-saw had been bequeathed to Laurie, who used it only occasionally, when he had no more serious work on hand for the "odd

moments." His best time and thoughts for the autumn months were to be devoted to painting a picture for Professor Coleman; he only waited for a fitting subject to present itself. In search of this he took long walks in the early mornings in every direction. At last, Reed Remsen helped him to a decision. As soon as he learned the intention of Laurie he exclaimed, "Now, why didn't you let on afore? There's a spot on the meadow road, not more'n two mile off, that's the prettiest pictur to be found in Ameriky outside of a gold frame."

Laurie consented to go with Reed and see the picture; and the result was, he decided that it should not much longer remain outside of a gold frame, and before long a neatly-finished specimen of Laurence's artistic skill was hanging over Professor Coleman's mantel in his far-away home.

Reed was a happier boy now than he had been through the summer. Time had hung heavy on his hands, except indeed when his father had managed to make him do a little work in the shop. Although he had tolerated John, and admired the professor, and become somewhat used to Edna's absence, he had not

felt anything like the comfortable freedom which he had formerly held, in common with Victor, of roaming about Pantops, in-doors and out, according to his inclination. Again he established himself in the laboratory to watch and question Pierre when at his chemical experiments, and in the studio when Laurie had time to paint ; once more he superintended Rex as he stuffed birds or improved his aquarium. When the boys were not at home he was contented to stand behind Edna's chair and watch the progress of her pen over the paper. She began at last to make him useful by reading her productions to him and watching to see if he smiled or sighed at the passages intended to produce emotion, thus judging of her probable success in interesting the children for whose pleasure she worked.

CHAPTER XVI.

EXPRESS AND MAIL.

A DAY or two after John's departure Edna and her aunt were much mystified by the arrival of a pretty solid package—a box it seemed to be—by express from New York, and addressed to Master Reginald Willoughby. As it came during school-hours, curiosity was held in abeyance for some time. Mrs. Schenck wished to waive ceremony and undo the package at once, but Edna—who ever since the day when she had asserted her rights in the Look-out Room had acquired a certain degree of dignity in her aunt's esteem—declared that such an insult should not be offered her little brother.

“Why, aunt,” she exclaimed, “when you were a little girl did you like it if grown people read your letters or took the first bite of your candy?”

"I did not have much candy, and don't know that I ever got a letter ; but if I had I guess I should have had more respect for my parents than to set myself up as young folks do now-a-days."

Mrs. Schenck went immediately out of the room in a buff, but the wonder-inspiring package remained without the disturbance of a knot of its string till Rex came. It was Auntie Blanche who saw him bounding over the gate, and called out to him the surprising intelligence that Christmas had done come for some folks, and they'd better take a look in the dining-room. Fingers flew then and knots were cut in a hurry, and before the wondering eyes of the female portion of the household Rex drew forth from its case a complete and handsome microscope. While the rest examined and admired the curious thing, its happy owner stood in the middle of the floor chuckling, with big tears in his eyes. It was Edna who discovered a card in the bottom of the box bearing the name "Anthony Coleman," and on its other side, in characters so cramped as to be almost illegible, was written this quotation from Milton, which Rex determined to commit to memory :

“The desire which tends to know
The works of God, thereby to glorify
The great Work-master, leads to no excess
That reaches blame, but rather merits praise
The more it seems excess ;
For wonderful indeed are all his works,
Pleasant to know, and worthiest to be all
Had in remembrance, alway with delight.”

Before Rex had recovered himself sufficiently to speak, Laurie and Pierre came in for their dinner, and the unusual state of things had to be explained to them. Then three hearty cheers were given for Professor Coleman, whereupon Rex found voice and joined in with a good-will.

A number of slides accompanied the microscope. In vain did Mrs. Schenck announce that dinner was waiting and time flying ; not one of the young folks could be induced to leave the new centre of attraction until each had looked at and wondered over the sting of a bee, the jaw of a spider, a picture of the royal family of England, some spicules of sponge, and some diatoms.

“But, Rex,” said Pierre, “do you know how to manage the instrument? It will require to be tenderly dealt with, and you are not the most careful boy in the world.”

"I shall have to study it out for myself," said Rex. "The professor told me a few things about microscopes, but if I had thought then that I was going to have one of my very own, I'd have found out a good deal more."

Rex had no appetite for dinner that noon; he carried his precious box to the Look-out Room, and spent every moment until school-time in trying to master some of its mysteries.

The next day the mail brought to this fortunate boy a book full of illustrations, telling all that a young student needed to know about microscopes, giving advice as to the selection of objects, and plain directions about mounting them. Rex's cup of happiness was full; he envied nobody when, school over, he could, with Reed at his side to assist, study out all the possibilities of his new treasure or walk about the neighborhood collecting objects to be viewed by its help. He felt sure that this possession was of more value to him than many books, and went to work with all diligence to make use of his eyes, as the professor had counselled him.

Letters came regularly from John, the first ones expressing great satisfaction with his

work, his employers, his boarding-place; he felt himself to be on the high road to success, and filled nearly every page with projects and hopes for the future, which his matter-of-fact mother glanced over with a "Pshaw!" but his cousins read with eager sympathy. After he had been away about three weeks there came an epistle in an entirely different tone. John was now convinced that he was working too hard; he had no leisure for any fun; he was not going to like that business anyway, and thought he had better resign the position and come home to wait until something more to his taste should turn up.

Mrs. Schenck replied to this letter in a few brief sentences, but they meant a good deal. Edna and the boys went to the Look-out Room, and, selecting a sheet from the stock of foolscap reserved by the author for literary purposes, wrote a joint appeal to John to have a good think before he took any decisive step. Pierre urged him to act like a man, and bade him remember that he had his own way to make in the world, and that his duty to his mother should hinder him from obeying any rash impulse.

Pierre had a lofty—and sometimes rather

offensive—style of expressing himself to the other boys—a tone which pervaded his portion of the family letter. Laurie perceived this, and told him that it would make John angry. “For,” said he, “you are very little older, and yet you talk to him as if you were his father; I would not stand that if I were in his place.” But Pierre refused to alter a word, and so Laurie did all he could to soften the impression by his own mild though equally decided words. Edna’s portion was very affectionate and sweet, while she echoed the advice of her brothers and begged him to stick to his work. Rex in bold round characters bade him remember what the professor had said, and by no means give up the ship, adding that it was really worth John’s while to come back and see his microscope.

With all the family opinions thus against him, John was forced to think better of his resolve to throw up his position; and, to his credit, it must be said that after this one attack of his old malady, fickleness, he did adhere bravely to his good resolutions, and said no more about making a change.

Shortly after this the mail brought a surprise to Pantops even more delightful to its

special recipient than the microscope had been to Rex ; and this was a letter from a Mr. Giles Bartlett of St. Louis to Laurence Willoughby. Laurie was alone when he read it, and had a little chance for a mental digestion of its contents before making them known.

Mr. Bartlett wrote that he was on the point of leaving home for a tour through Italy, Germany, and Switzerland—that he would probably be absent from eighteen months to two years. On account of his poor eyesight he needed a companion who could act as amanuensis and read to him. He wrote to Master Willoughby, he said, at the suggestion of his friend Professor Coleman, who had recommended him with great warmth as a most suitable youth for the position. His intention was to pay all the expenses of his companion and give him a small allowance. Further details he reserved for future settlement should Master Willoughby decide to accept his proposal. The middle of October was the time he intended starting : an immediate answer was requested.

Laurie had taken his letter to the Look-out Room. Especially since the coming of Mrs. Schenck had this been the place of retirement,

as well as work, for the young Willoughbys. There, in the studio, gazing out of the north window, letter in hand, like one in a trance, who sees all things but perceives nothing, Pierre found him.

"Come, come," said he; "we are all waiting for you at table; didn't you hear the bell? Why, Laurie, what are you staring at? Why do you look so strangely?"

"Let us go down," Laurie said, and turned toward Pierre with such sparkling eyes that the latter knew before his brother spoke that something of great importance had come into his life.

Great excitement prevailed in the dining-room when Mr. Bartlett's proposal was made known, and there was but one opinion as to the answer that must be sent. So glorious an opportunity must not be neglected. Even Aunt Schenck expressed herself with much warmth of feeling on the subject, and remarked at once to Edna that she would go out that very afternoon and buy a piece of muslin, so that they together could go right to work on shirts for the boy. The hero of all the excitement was quiet while the others talked, and when directly addressed remarked

that he could not see his way clear about going. In surprise the rest asked him for his reasons, but in vain; Laurie was one that kept his own counsel. It was motherly Edna who succeeded in getting at the hidden trouble. Laurie's slender earnings being all swallowed up in regular expenses, he had nothing to fall back upon with which to provide himself a suitable outfit.

"Oh, why did our father make such a will?" exclaimed Rex with a comical sigh.

"Now this is all nonsense, Laurence!" remarked his aunt with severity. "Of course you are going to Europe; not another word about it! I am going to buy and make up a full set of under-clothing for you, to begin with. You don't need so much, surely, that among us all we can't give you an outfit."

At this signal kind offers came thick and fast. Auntie Blanche hobbled up to Laurie and hugged him to her breast, while she informed him that she had a beautiful set of fine cotton socks all ready for him; she had knit them during *her* "odd moments," she said, and laid them by. Little did she guess, she faltered, that they were to be worn by one of her boys in the dust and dirt of a foreign land.

Pierre instantly invited his brother to make a visit to the tailor at his expense; Edna whispered to him that he need have no concern about the other requirements; she took it as her special privilege to get his trunk and pack it with whatever was needful for his comfort over and above what had already been promised.

Thus the great question was settled, and Laurie, with a heart full to overflowing with happy anticipations, wrote his reply to Mr. Bartlett. Several letters passed between them during the next two weeks, in which all the arrangements for the journey were made with perfect satisfaction to all parties. Now all was bustle and excitement in the quiet old home. Everybody worked and planned and dreamed pleasant visions for the favored boy. Edna left her story just at its crisis, shut up her desk without a pang, and stitched from morning till night on his wardrobe. Rex neglected his microscope and hovered about Laurie with admiring wonder. John wrote a letter full of hearty congratulations, adding that he should try his best to be at the steamer's wharf and bid him good-bye. Reed Remsen "hung around" more than ever, much

to Mrs. Schenck's disgust, watched every preparation, and asked Laurie many and perplexing questions about the countries he was going to see.

The end of it all came at last, and Laurie with his new friend stood on the deck of an ocean steamer waving his handkerchief to John Schenck, the last of the dear home-faces he was to see for many a day.

At Pantops a great silence and gloom settled over the household. After such unwonted hurry and stir came the usual comfortless rebound. Edna could not settle herself at her writing, for thoughts of the dear traveller came between her and the fancied fortunes of her heroes. Mrs. Schenck, for once in her life, admitted that she needed rest—she was completely tired out with work. The boys went through their daily round of work and study, but for them there was a great void when the "odd moments" came and the north side of Look-out Room remained orderly and vacant. Auntie Blanche moved her easy-chair out of that chosen retreat, saying that it was "too powerful lonesome, now that Marse John wasn't there to work his racket-saw, and Marse Laurie had done gone abroad." Edna

remarked that she took comfort in thinking that there were no more changes ahead, since it was not probable any other member of the little family would think of beginning business in New York or setting sail to Europe.

She and Pierre were standing together in the shadow of the great elms, watching the sunset glow in the skies, when this was said; she thought that Pierre had a peculiar expression in his eyes as he looked at her without making any response. They lingered a few moments longer, and when the glory above them had faded to sombre gray they walked slowly toward the house. At the door Pierre placed in his sister's hand a letter and turned away. A thrill of foreboding passed through Edna's heart at sight of the torn envelope bearing Professor Coleman's writing. Letters of late had signified events in the Pantops family. She went to her room, lighted a lamp, and read the following:

“PIERRE WILLOUGHBY:

“MY DEAR BOY: How are you all thriving at Pantops? and what is the latest news from Laurence? How many odd moments have you devoted of late to chemistry? The

time has now arrived when I can make known to you a plan—or rather a hope—which has been maturing toward its realization since my visit to Pantops. A scholarship in this college is now vacant, and my efforts toward securing it for you have met with success. A full course of study is open to you, and the only expenses that will come upon you are those for board and washing. I have a plan in my mind by which you can easily meet these by the work of a few spare hours daily. Make your decision at once, and let me know. The fall term has already begun, and there is no time to be lost.”

The usually quiet Edna threw herself upon the bed and gave herself up to a fit of weeping. It was long before she grew calm—not, indeed, until exhaustion overcame her and she had no more tears to shed. She fell asleep at last with gloomy thoughts of how fast the birds were leaving the dear home nest! how soon it might be empty!

Morning brought serener and more unselfish feelings. Edna lingered long before her dressing-table brushing her hair, longing and dreading to go down and talk with Pierre. Her eye rest-

ed a moment on the portrait of a great-uncle hung over her mantel. It was a noble face, yet marked with strong lines that told plainly of a struggle and a victory. Was there, Edna wondered, no way to nobleness and victory but by means of struggle? Must she let her brothers go forth, one after another, to the uncertain contest of life?

The decision was made as Edna felt from the beginning that it must be: Pierre was to go. Again she and Aunt Schenck were at work on an outfit—this time one of less labor and expense, because Pierre's home-leaving indicated more serious work and needed less holiday attire than Laurie's. Pierre found her one day alone in the almost deserted Look-out Room busily stitching away, with tears marking her progress along the seam. He came and put his arms around her without a word. This, instead of comforting, seemed to make the tears come faster.

"Oh, Pierre!" she cried, "how can I let you go? how can I?"

"But you let John go, Edna, and then Laurence; why are you not willing to spare me?"

"Oh, but John was only a cousin—hardly

that—and we had known him but a short time. Laurie, dear fellow! was younger—I miss him deeply—but, Pierre, it is you upon whom we have all leaned; you are the man of the house; you have been my intimate companion. You know I have never made enthusiastic friendships with other girls; I have had only you.”

Then Pierre put her arm in his, and together they paced up and down the old room while he told her his long-silent hopes and desires, and how providentially this friendly offer of Professor Coleman was opening for him the door to a thorough education, through which he meant to pass right on to success and fame. “I shall not be content, Edna,” he said “until I have made you proud to be known as my sister.”

“Ambitious boy!” she answered. “I love you now, and is not that better than being proud of you?”

When the winter set in, and deep snows covered the pleasant garden-paths, Aunt Schenck and Edna were left alone, with only Rex’s whistle and Victor’s bark to make an occasional noise through the much-too-quiet house.











